REVOLUTIONARY SYNDICALISM

J. A. ESTEY

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An Exposition and a Criticism

By

J. A. ESTEY, Ph.D.

Sometime Professor of Economics in Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia.

With an Introduction by

L. LOVELL PRICE, M.A.

Reader in Economic History in the University of Oxford

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PREFACE

THIS essay was originally prepared for a doctor's thesis at the University of Wisconsin in 1911. In its present form, it is much expanded and completely recast.

It has been my aim to explain the theory and practice of the Syndicalist movement in contemporary Socialism; particularly to what extent it differs from Socialism proper. Hence this essay is largely devoted to explaining how Syndicalists propose to bring about the emancipation of the labouring classes, and what social order they would set up to replace the one they would destroy. An attempt has also been made to estimate the value of their proposals. It has been thought advisable to introduce, before the main body of the essay, some account of the evolution of Syndicalism, and of the organisation actually at the disposal of French labourers to-day. Otherwise many references might remain obscure. But I have omitted any detailed history of the turbulent practice which has been so dramatic a feature of the French Labour Movement of the last fifteen years.

Students of Syndicalism in France will soon realise that the literature of the movement is of two quite distinct classes. There are the expositions of Syndicalist practice by militant workers, engrossed in the actual propaganda of the movement; and there are the more philosophic writings of the "intellectuals," endeavouring to find a theoretic setting for a method of action born of experience. Perhaps the most notable men of action, whose contributions to Syndicalism have had a great popularity, are Émile Pouget, for years the editor of *La Voix du Peuple*, and Victor Griffuelhes, a prominent official of the *Confédération Générale du Travail*. Of the theorists, the chief is, undoubtedly, Georges Sorel, whose works, particularly, *L'Avenir Socialiste des Syndicats*, *Réflexions sur la Violence*, and various papers in *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, constitute the main body of Syndicalist theory. With him one must include his very able collaborators, Hubert Lagardelle and Edouard Berth, of *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, who have probably done quite as much as Sorel to popularise the peculiar theories of Revolutionary Syndicalism.

The co-ordination of these two sources of information has been, at times, of considerable difficulty. They do not always seem to be in harmony. Much that is vital in Sorel's work, e.g., his idea of the general strike as a social myth, might by no means be acceptable to the more

practical exponents of Syndicalism. Nor would the "intellectuals" give their assent to such a practice as *sabotage* which has been enthusiastically championed by the men of action. Such differences, apparently, have arisen from the circumstance that while the practice of Syndicalism has been developed as a result of actual experience, and in the stress of movement, the theory seems to have been expounded later, when Syndicalism had become a reality, and when there seemed to be a need for some philosophic mind to co-ordinate and explain the somewhat confused practice which circumstances had created. Syndicalism as a practice existed in the early 'nineties. But the theory of Syndicalism had no notable exposition before the appearance of Sorel's *L'Avenir Socialiste des Syndicats* in 1897.

Making allowances for this source of confusion, it will be found that Syndicalism has become a fairly consistent contribution to the numerous solutions of the great social problem.

It is to be noted, finally, that the Syndicalism here described is Revolutionary Syndicalism, based upon class war and the general strike as means for the overthrow of the capitalistic system of industry. There does exist a Syndicalism which is not revolutionary, but reformist. This I have made no attempt to describe, partly because it differs very little from the familiar trade unionism of England, partly because it is Revolu-

tionary Syndicalism which is generally meant when the word Syndicalism is used.

I wish to express my obligations to Mr. L. L. Price of Oxford for contributing the introduction.

J. A. ESTEY.

INTRODUCTION

"LES erreurs sociales sont éternelles; selon les temps elles revêtent des formes diverses." With this epigrammatic sentence, insisting on the enduring substance of the mistakes made about the constitution of society, despite of the changing mode of their attire, the French economist, M. Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, began in 1884 the Preface to his "critical examination" of the "new socialism" of his day. Almost an entire generation has since passed, and in the interval fresh issues of that particular product of a prolific pen, which, though veteran, has not lost its industry or verve, have been published, with the necessary corrections and additions, bringing the indictment up to date. But the "new socialism" of a quarter of a century ago has been displaced, and a survey of the subsequent development of faith and propaganda shows that the most remarkable and indeed, unique, fresh phase has appeared in France itself.

For a period that, compared with the vicissitudes of a previous century or more, might be deemed unprecedented, the French people have preserved their republican form of government. But the resourceful versatility of their

genius has been proved by the origination and support, in bookish theorising and resounding act alike, of a startling new variety of socialistic creed to which it would not be easy, and perhaps it might prove impossible, to find an exact parallel. In a sense it is true that a decisive impulse was imparted to this movement in the very year that M. Leroy-Beaulieu's *Collectivism* reached his readers; for it was also in 1884 that M. Waldeck-Rousseau's Government passed the bill, fixing the legal status, hitherto in doubt, of the *syndicats* and their federations. Not however before the lapse of twenty years could the fresh development be correctly said to have finally won its dominance in labour circles, although the *Bourses du Travail*, the machinery of which it has employed for its own purpose, were started in 1887, and its directing centre, the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (known to friends and foes as the famous "C.G.T.") was established in 1895.

The vivid finished picture of this new species of a large old genus, drawn and coloured in the following pages by my former pupil and present friend, Dr. Estey, will reward, I venture to affirm, the close, sustained inspection of all interested in social study. They will find an "exposition" and a "criticism" of "Revolutionary Syndicalism" more complete and authoritative, more acute, sympathetic and judicial, than any which have hitherto, so far as I am

aware, been supplied in this country. The competent writer of this lucid essay has explored original sources for his information. He has used his material with discrimination and discernment. He has contrived to be appreciative without failing to remain detached. He has, in my opinion, observed throughout a discreet proportion, and his general plan seems to me as happily conceived as it is successfully executed.

I am confident that no one who takes up this book will lay it down without being grateful for the opportune service rendered in exhibiting the aims and methods, and in gauging the importance, of an agitation which has proved its power to stir large masses of mankind. It should certainly correct some loose, hasty thinking, and it may clarify some misty notions, which have recently been prominent on this side of the Channel in popular talk and journalistic comment. For Dr. Estey proves that there is much more rational content in the syndicalistic gospel than had been commonly supposed, though he believes no less firmly that the movement has already failed and, in any event, could not ultimately succeed.

A friendly observer of France and the French, equipped from an armoury of exact and comprehensive knowledge diligently acquired through many years, recently remarked[1] on the decline of "ideal-

[1] *Cardinal Manning and other Essays*, by J. E. C. Bodley.

ism" in that country. It is, he urged, no longer the potent force that it once was in moulding thought and in inspiring act. Yet, in the sense in which he apparently wishes to employ the word, it might be maintained that he had overlooked an apposite illustration. The dominance of an "idea" in itself, and the élan with which the French will rush into the fray beneath a banner bearing as its sole legend an apt phrase or sentence, expressing in neat summary some abstract notion rather than some concrete person, thing or policy, is exemplified in Syndicalism. It is, in fact, shown there no less noticeably than in the Dreyfus controversy, which is cited in Mr. Bodley's essay as the final instance of the public exhibition of what was a distinctive national trait.

In Dr. Estey's narrative we are constantly reminded of the enormous and pervasive influence of the conception of the "general strike"; and he tells us that with some it has now become an "idea," never perhaps destined to be realized, which yet acts as a continual stimulus, prompting, in spite of recurrent failure, resolute and confident endeavours to attain the desired goal. What is thus shown to be true of the "general strike," applies also to other language used in the movement he reviews. There are, it would seem, convenient "social myths," such as the "iron law of wages," which is not deliberately recognised as fact, but can be employed to keep Labour in active enmity to Capital.

So curiously compounded is the Syndicalist propaganda; it is characteristically French in its genesis and its appeal.

It is, no doubt, partly the case that the actual practice of Syndicalism has taken its own line, parallel to, but independent of, the philosophising speculation of an academic writer like Sorel. He has been lately described by a keen American critic[1] as imparting the "metaphysical touch that works as mystically on the imagination as the shadowy dialectic of Marx worked upon the awed devotees who could but faintly guess his meaning." But Dr. Estey has rightly introduced in his account a tolerably full résumé of the reflections of that philosopher. He himself, it must be allowed, has now abandoned Syndicalism; and his thinking, like that of others of a similar status, may be more legitimately considered as derived from rationalising observation of the acts of Syndicalists than as ruling or inspiring their conduct. Nevertheless, a knowledge of these theoretical beliefs is necessary to an interpretation of the practical aims and methods of the movement. It is there that the *motif* can be found which will suffice to bring harmony from apparent discord. It is thus that some consistent rationale is discovered for what might otherwise seem unreasonable inconsistency. Yet, as Dr. Estey hints, it will not always be easy, and sometimes it may become impossible, to reconcile

[1] Mr. John Graham Brooks, in his *American Syndicalism.*

the views of what he calls the "intellectuals" with the policy of those whom he styles the "men of action." The former, for example, may dislike particular tactical devices[1] which the latter will regard as the necessary means of giving opportune effect to the broad strategy outlined and recommended.

If we are, then, to judge Syndicalism as a whole, and to view it at its best, we shall not neglect the means of study which lie ready to our hands in the literary contributions of such writers as Sorel. We shall meet even in those secluded precincts with a system which affects grandiose designs, and contrasts with the opportunist temporising methods countenanced by many who aspire to be modern representative socialists. Let us try, with Dr. Estey's help, to fix its place in the historical succession of socialistic thought; and let us examine in his company its relations, whether of unlikeness or similitude, to other modes of socialistic action.

In that authoritative work on *Collectivism*, to which we have referred, M. Leroy-Beaulieu attempted to distinguish the "new socialism" from the "old," by saying that the "romantic" type belonging to the past had been followed by a fresh variety, which advanced a claim to be, by contrast, "scientific." By the former he meant the class of imaginative projects of ideal communities put forward by a long series of writers

[1] e.g., sabotage.

from the days of Plato onwards. The name given by Sir Thomas More to his pictured commonwealth was so characteristic of their origin and aims that it was used as a general designation. But, while these agreeable accounts of a state where perfect happiness would reign, and the wretched accompaniments of poverty would find no room, were regarded as "utopian" "patterns in the Heavens" they had frequently, in fact, been framed by preserving in emphatic shape the pleasing details of the existing order, and by softening, or obliterating, those unwelcome features of which the writer at any rate disapproved. Slavery, for example, continued to exist in Plato's *Republic*; and in More's *Utopia* we can read a moving tale of the evil consequences of those enclosures of common land which were the social problem of his day. The same use of contemporary circumstance is found in Mr. Wells' employment of the last discoveries of progressive science to enlarge the amenities of daily life in his *Anticipations* and in the appreciation by William Morris, in his *News from Nowhere*, of the wholesome charm of the quiet country, and its healthy, simple, rustic occupations, contrasted with the noise and dirt and disease of town-life. Similarly we may pronounce that Revolutionary Syndicalism, exhibiting, like these Utopias, an "idealism" of the kind we have described, resembles them as well in the sensibility it shows to the surrounding atmosphere of actual present

fact. For the pivot of its system is furnished by the *syndicats*. It is the trade unions which are the potent agents of the "revolution," and for that purpose they are to use, on a scale of impressive magnitude, the modern instrument, conspicuous in ordinary industrial life, of the strike. To their hands, and not to State officials, the administration of the new regime is committed.

It is in this substitution of the *syndicats* for the omnipotent comprehensive State that Syndicalism enters into sharp conflict with that Collectivism which had filled, before its entry on the stage, the rôle of the "new socialism." The Syndicalists, Dr. Estey shows, have moved back a further step towards the "anarchism" which Proudhon countenanced; and their system may be summarily described as an amalgam of some of the ideas of that incongruous writer with some of the opinions held and preached by Marx. The character, however, of this "anarchism" should be stated. It is not wholly destructive; and it rests on groups, and not on individuals. But the federations which it favours, and it uses, recognise a remarkable amount of autonomous independence in their constituent units; and the centralizing State is dismissed from the scheme.

Socialists are often criticised for being stronger and more definite in their negative demolition than in their positive construction. They are said to know with sufficient certainty which existing institutions they would overthrow; but they

are charged with becoming vague and hesitating when they are pressed to state what they would erect in the place of what they have destroyed. This particular reproach, however, does not apply so much to the "romantic" utopias of the past as to their successor, the "scientific" socialism of Karl Marx. If the earlier propounders of imaginative schemes betrayed a caprice for fanciful embellishment, they cannot justly be said to have regarded the constructive portion of their work as secondary or unimportant. Dr. Estey is at similar pains to show, in contradiction of current views, that Syndicalists in their turn have not forgotten or neglected this side of the problem. It has received more than passing notice, and to the different parts of the complex organisation, of which Syndicalism is, in fact, now composed, varying duties are assigned in the new regime. In practice Syndicalism consists, not of isolated individual workmen, but of federated *syndicats*. The process, however, has been long and tedious, involving at each stage those acute recurring wrangles that haunt socialistic agitation, by which the present large *Confédération Générale du Travail* has been built. There are cross-divisions in the structure, as the federations of which it is constituted have been formed on different lines, corresponding both to occupation and locality. Despite of the notoriety it has won, and the alarm diffused, it is more formidable in appearance than reality; and it is by no means

even now one harmonious union, freed from imminent risk of paralysing or enfeebling strife. For, while it has been relieved by force of the disturbing presence of several successive malcontents, the idea of independent action and autonomous liberty has not ceased to be given an impracticable measure of respect.

In consequence, largely, of this continued process of expulsion, Syndicalism has been violently removed from affinity with the last developments of that "State Socialism" which are prominent in our day. These may have gained less favour in France itself than they have received in other countries such as Germany or England. But it is by contrast with a habit, which has grown and spread with use, of abandoning the reasoning apparatus, and omitting item after item from the practical programme, of Marx, that the present leaders of Syndicalism defiantly confront the weaker or the wiser brethren, who have fallen away, with their own steadfast belief in the "class war" confidently preached by the first missioners of "scientific" socialism. They at least do not conceal their predilection for the use of force. Many, if not most, of their followers would carry, if they could, the strongholds of their opponents, with whom they would hold no parley, by a sudden *coup-de-main*. They accept impatiently delay, and they use secrecy and caution as tactical necessities.

It is true, as we have seen, that there are some

differences of view between the "intellectuals" and the "men of action." It is also true, as Dr. Estey states, that "reformists" may be found in the ranks of both, who, preferring the "direct action" of Labour to State interference, would nevertheless avail themselves of the methods of conciliation appropriate to "industrial peace," when a likely opportunity was offered. A few, too, may be unwilling to neglect or forego all participation in the political activity which might win by successive stages an increasing part of what they wish. A meticulous comparison of individual utterances might reveal diversity or inconsistency; but the dominant note is plainly heard. That is one of no compromise with the existing order. In their recoil from the advances of State Socialists, and their repugnance to the offer of concessions, Syndicalists are more agreed perhaps than any other similar group of men. Socialists who have joined the French Government, like M. Millerand, and those who, like M. Briand, have actually become Prime Ministers, are considered traitorous deserters. "Revisionists," like Edward Bernstein in Germany, and "Fabians," such as Mr. and Mrs. Webb in England, are regarded as enemies rather than friends. Nor is it surprising that an outspoken condemnation[1] of Syndicalism should proceed from the facile pen of the present Parliamentary leader of the Labour Party in

[1] *Syndicalism: A Critical Examination.*

this country, who may without serious injustice be described as willing to be recognised as an adept in the art of political manipulation.

Mr. Ramsay Macdonald's more elaborate statements, published previously,[1] of the socialistic creed and practice proper to the present day may be considered typical of a movement which was wresting from the older followers of Marx their claim, allowed in 1884, to be regarded as the "new" style of socialists. He, like others, appeared to be engaged in an attempt to appropriate whatever is considered good in individualistic action and belief, and, selecting similarly what may be thought most attractive in socialistic theory and conduct, to offer the resulting combination as the acceptable and the authoritative gospel. His own skill in this conjuring work cannot be questioned; whether his system, or his lack of definitive system, will eventually satisfy, is perhaps more open to dispute. But his method is significant.

What, however, we may inquire, is left remaining when the process is complete? Socialism has been purged of the absurd dialectic subtilties of the theory which treated value as consisting of congealed quantities of labour, even of that "socially necessary" kind to which Marx was driven. It is relieved, too, of the notion, no less ridiculous and unworkable, that members more valuable

[1] *Socialism and Society* and *Socialism and Government.*

to society should not receive larger rewards than those less urgently required. German "Revisionists," again, have recognised that, in the case of peasant proprietors at least, facts contradict the crude assumption that the ownership of land inevitably grows in size. English "Fabians" finally contend with persuasive plausibility that "State interference" and "Municipal trading" are alike steps, popularly approved, taken towards the new regime. But such extensive emendation and erasure leave little of the original manuscript of Marx. The shifting notion alone remains, which has itself become attenuated with enlargement, of surpluses accruing to different members of society without exertion of their own that should be taken by some means through taxation for the public gain. That idea at least, which may or may not be found finally in its turn to be impracticable, can be now rightly described as a constant element in socialistic systems; but it is an exiguous survival of the "scientific" socialism of *Das Kapital.*

From such opportunist compromise Syndicalism, in its dominant Revolutionary form, represents a vehement revolt. But it is noticeable, as Dr. Estey shows, that the part of Marxian teaching on which it lays stress, is not the use, or the abuse, of the theories borrowed from economists, which had earned for his system the name of "scientific," but the conception of historical evolution which he advanced. In a suggestive

little book[1] Professor Seligman maintained some while ago that Marx had not received the full acknowledgment, that was his due, for the impulse he had given to the idea, which has since found wide acceptance, of the "economic interpretation of history." The French Syndicalists, at any rate, accord no niggard recognition to the particular interpretation announced by Marx of the course which the economic development of the world must pursue.

Mr. Macdonald was firmly convinced that "catastrophic" socialism had become no less impossible an anachronism than the "utopian" socialism of the romantic type. But Marx himself shared with the "intellectual" expositors of Syndicalism the reasoned view that the "revolution" would take place in an irresistible evolutionary process. We have seen already that the "general strike" tends in their hands to become a retreating and abstract "idea" rather than a concrete incident immediately impending. Yet both he and they allowed, and affirmed, that the exercise of active force might, and should, hasten the inevitable; and they adopt, with emphasis, his combative conception of a "war" between two "classes," which consist, on the one hand, of the possessors of the instruments of production and, on the other, of lifelong wage-earners. An internecine struggle, then, between Capital (including Land)

[1] *The Economic Interpretation of History*, by E. R. A. Seligman.

and Labour is never absent from Syndicalist thought and act. In this sense this new phase of socialism is a return to that more extreme kind of Marxist teaching which had gradually been whittled down by his successors, though they too have retained in some instances a general belief in his reading of past history. As economic historian his influence has been more enduring than as economic theorist; and Syndicalism, testifying to this tendency, emphasises the more violent aspects of the Marxian interpretation which it seizes for its purpose.

We shall however reach a more adequate understanding of its creed and conduct, if we note some curious traits described by Dr. Estey. Nothing perhaps appears at first sight more foolishly inconsistent, but on closer inspection is seen to be in reality more profoundly rational, than the plan that Capital should be allowed, and even prompted and encouraged, to obtain and use its maximum of "exploiting" power. The sufficient reason for this policy is that we shall thus accelerate the arrival, and intensify the bitterness, of the determining conflict. It is not so difficult to see why the action of the State, favoured by many socialists of a less violent type, is distrusted, and party politics are shunned, by Revolutionary Syndicalists. Both are tainted by corrupting contact with capitalism; and they reflect the wrong beliefs and support the unjust arrangements of the existing order. Labour should fight its

own battle as Labour. "Direct action" on its part is necessary and desired; and every strike, whether it fail or succeed in its immediate object, is so much gain because it has implied the assertion by Labour, of its rights, and is the partial realisation of the "idea," of which the complete fulfilment is the "general strike."

Dr. Estey pertinently observes that French working men will furnish grudgingly, or will more probably withhold altogether, the monetary support of their trade unions, which is needed as the preliminary to a dispute long-meditated, carefully-prepared and perseveringly-contested. But to this rooted dislike for regular subscriptions must be added, in inducing a preference for a short sharp combat suddenly commenced with little pecuniary resources, the captivating thought of an impetuous onset carrying all before it. On the other hand, the methods of "sabotage" are not so noticeable for overt violence in the damage or destruction of machinery, or in the check or veto of the transport of men or goods by injury to the permanent way. But the underhand, concealed evasion of the usual requirements of honest service by spoiling tools, or by slackened energy, or by bad workmanship, are more remarkable. Such methods are considered fair in "war," and the secret scamping may prove even more effective, and be less likely to fail than open force. It may then be preferred as better tactics.

For further illustration of the disposition and behaviour of French Syndicalists, the readers of this Introduction are advised to consult for themselves the instructive text of the actual essay. There, too, they will find a lucid and informing story of the initiation and development of the movement. They will observe the important rôle which has been played in that advance by the *Bourses du Travail,* and possibly they may be surprised at the successful manner in which the *syndicats* have utilised for their own ends an effective mechanism placed unintentionally at their disposal by the Government. They have also defeated in a large degree the subsequent attempts of the awakened and alarmed authorities to restrain their activity by withholding the continued use of the instruments thus furnished and employed.

Yet the terror which Syndicalism has caused in France is probably, as Dr. Estey hints, disproportionate to its real capacity for inflicting lasting harm. It has not ceased to be threatened by dissensions, and it comprises but a fraction of the total number of French working men. If indeed the "exposition," which he has placed first in his essay, does ample justice to the claims of Revolutionary Syndicalism to be more rational and systematic than superficial critics in this or other countries had hastily supposed—and he conscientiously endeavours to pourtray the movement as it is rather than as it has been mistakenly imagined—

he does not on that account refrain from the damnatory "criticism" which it deserves in the second and concluding section of his book.

In the course of this "criticism" he has occasion to point out that, while Revolutionary Syndicalism is characteristically French in origin, methods and aims, its influence has spread to other lands. In the United States Mr. Graham Brooks has recently produced a sequel to his study published some years ago, of "The Social Unrest" prevailing in America no less noticeably than elsewhere. In this new book on *American Syndicalism*,[1] taking the illustrative example of the organisation known as the "Industrial Workers of the World," he hints that "socialism in its more revolutionary character" may not improbably find "its most fruitful field" in the near future in his own country.

Nor again is the interest for English readers of Dr. Estey's survey limited to the opportunity afforded of gaining there a full and accurate knowledge of a foreign movement with which they can have no immediate personal concern. For, as he shows, perhaps the most conclusive instance of the failure of the vaunted weapon of the "general strike" to achieve the desired end can be drawn from a comparison of the ambitious hopes with the poor results of the Coal-Miners' Strike of 1912 in the United Kingdom. Dissatisfaction had been not unnaturally felt,

[1] Quoted above.

he remarks, by the younger and more active unionists with the cautious and pacific policy of the older men, who have grown grey in the tenure of their offices as leaders; and this feeling has combined with the small yield of desired laws from independent representation of Labour in Parliament, and the economic tightness caused by rising prices accompanying wages which have been stationary or have not advanced correspondingly, to prepare no unkindly soil for the rapid germination of the seed of discontent sown by Syndicalist propaganda.

The British Colliers failed in 1912, in spite of their accumulated funds and their close combination. *A fortiori* therefore we should be surprised to find French Syndicalists, loosely joined together and disliking regular subscriptions, succeeding in their efforts. Three examples of such failure are cited by Dr. Estey. He investigates the Miners' strike of 1902, the General Strike, for which careful preparation had been made, on the 1st of May, 1906, and the Railway strike of 1910, which possibly miscarried through precipitate declaration. In the first case of the three an absence of solidarity in the miners shares responsibility for the failure with the hesitations of the directing body, the *Confédération Générale du Travail.*

But Dr. Estey contends with cogency that such experience has proved that the " general strike " is not a success, and that, the wider the range of its grandiose operations, the more inevitable and

complete has been the fiasco in which it has ended. It is especially noteworthy that the failure is conspicuous, where an attempt has been made to apply compelling pressure to the public by stopping indispensable services, like railway communication and the supply of coal. The patent insuperable damning facts are that the poorer classes will be the first to suffer, and that employers who might be vanquished, if they were handled separately in succession, are stimulated to combine in firm resistance by a simultaneous joint attack. Sabotage, too, is a weapon with a double edge which may harm those who use it as much as those who are assailed thereby.

The "general strike" has failed; and with it, Dr. Estey reasonably holds, Revolutionary Syndicalism is condemned. In France itself, despite of a racial affinity for the violence springing from emotion, and an attachment to the "idea" as such, the majority of workmen are, he urges, "reformist" rather than "revolutionary," or at any rate it is a very tiny body which would willingly take more than a few small doses of revolution, and would treat it as the "rule" and not as the "exception" The *syndicats* themselves belong in several instances to that "hum-drum" pacific class, which is typical of our own Trade Unions; and, as a whole, they do not embrace more than a minority of the total number of French working-men. Nor are all the *syndi-*

cats included in those federations of trades or of localities, of which the *Confédération Générale du Travail* is composed, while that body in its turn does not embrace under its control all Federations. What perhaps is even more significant is the circumstance that in its existing constitution the representation of the component elements is not proportioned to their respective numbers. Accordingly an active eloquent minority can secure the adoption, and public announcement, of views with which a silent majority may not agree, or be willing to co-operate.

This last arrangement is in full accord with the distinctive tenets of the acknowledged leaders of Syndicalist thought; but it is an obvious source of weakness when the "general strike" is being attempted. There is a section of the body which is desirous of a change; and, as Dr. Estey shows, influenced by such considerations, or by more acute and fundamental differences of creed and policy, prominent adherents break away from time to time without any forcible expulsion. The most significant departure, he remarks, has been that of Sorel himself, who can be appropriately described as the "high priest" of the movement. Yet Sorel, frankly owning disillusionment, has declared that "Syndicalism has not realised" his "expectations"; and will write no more in its support.

Such experiences, of course, have not been uncommon in the previous history of socialistic

agitation; but Syndicalism seems, as Dr. Estey states, to suffer from a special and incurable defect of its own manufacture. We may imagine that the serious difficulties of the "general strike" are overcome and that a clean slate has been presented for the planning of the new regime. We may suppose that the notorious admitted failures of the self-governing workshops of Industrial Co-operation, which can be traced to want of funds, or, more demonstrably, to a refusal to pay adequately for the command of the needed technical capacity, are inconclusive, although trade unions do not obviously supply a suitable training ground for business management, or the congenial atmosphere for the quick, full recognition of superior ability. But an insuperable obstacle remains behind.

That is inherent in the very constitution of Syndicalism. It is, it is true, "anarchic in the sense of an anarchism based on groups rather than individuals. But the passion for autonomy which it feels is not compatible with effective action. Syndicalism is a form of federalism which attaches an excessive power to the federating units. Its theory and its practice in effect regard the individuals as free and equal within the *syndicats*, consider the *syndicats* as free and equal within the federations, and hold the federations to be free and equal within the *Confédération Générale*. Is successful government possible in such conditions? Dr. Estey pertinently asks whether the State Socialism

which Syndicalism abhors may not be contrasted to advantage.

Accordingly, he concludes that the Syndicalist State, if established, could not last. He even contends that, while we may still see from time to time the occasional recurrence of that forcible action which Syndicalism likes and recommends, the movement has already reached and passed its zenith in the country of its origin. His last words, however, are appreciative; and we cannot but agree with him in the view that Syndicalists may be properly admired for their "lofty enthusiasm" and their "splendid zeal." We must allow that they have obviously "succeeded more than other agitators in arousing the consciousness of the most apathetic workers." The final summary, too, of so sympathetic but judicial an observer that "the service of Revolutionary Syndicalism to the cause of Labour must be sought, not in its programme of action, nor in its model for future society, but in the spirit of independency and militancy which it has kept alive and energetically fostered in the hearts of the working classes," commands our assent because it is the outcome of a near but detached survey of Syndicalists as they not only actually are in fact, but also as they have aspired to be in their most elevated moments.

L. L. PRICE.

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REVOLUTIONARY SYNDICALISM

AN EXPOSITION AND A CRITICISM

CHAPTER I.

THE EVOLUTION OF REVOLUTIONARY SYNDICALISM.

REVOLUTIONARY Syndicalism, both as a Socialistic theory and as a method of action, is a product of circumstances. If it flourishes to-day, it is as the outcome of experiments in revolutionism, rather than of the intellectual travail of social philosophers. It has become the accepted platform of many members and supporters of the wage-earning class, because by a process of elimination it seems to its exponents to offer the only satisfactory guarantee for the complete disappearance of the present industrial system. Many of the leaders of the movement have come to Syndicalism through Socialism, convinced, by experience, of the impotence of the methods practised by present-day Socialists, opposed particularly to the Parliamentary activity, now so common, in which they see a tactics of compromise impossible to reconcile with revolutionary theory. Others, chiefly Anarchists of the type of Proudhon, enemies of the State and hostile to all its manifestations, Parliaments included, constitutionally incapable of countenancing any form of political activity, strengthened, finally, in their attitude by the meagre results of the methods they oppose, have found in Revolutionary Syndicalism a theory and a practice congenial to their ideas, and satisfactory to their aspirations.

Thus, either from temperament or as a result of experience, those revolutionists who have contributed most largely to the shaping of Revolutionary Syndicalism, have taken their stand apart from the various Socialist parties with which France has truly been over-supplied, and have turned to the syndicats or trade unions as a more favourable field for the propagation of their doctrines and methods of action. But it was 1900 before they had become firmly entrenched in their new position, though the Syndicalist movement had been alive for many decades. Even under the Republic thirty years, almost, had to pass, years of experiment, strivings, quarrels, before the trade unions and the revolutionists could find a common policy in the devotion of the organisation of the labouring classes to the cause of revolution. Anarchism, Socialism, Syndicalism,—between these various schools of thought and action the militants wavered and hesitated, till finally the very force of circumstances drove them into the camp of Syndicalism.

The progress of this interesting and instructive development it is the aim of this chapter to outline.

Since 1830, when capitalism was beginning to evolve its peculiar social characteristics, and the working class were becoming conscious of the limitations by which they were surrounded, ideas of revolution have never ceased to colour the dreams of militant labourers and militant friends of the labouring classes. Favoured, as a recent writer has pointed out,[1] by the character of the French labourer, "more capable of a single great effort than of monotonous and patient labour," and by the idealism of the Latin peoples, "who prefer to modest and immediate gains the pursuit of a distant but elevated end," the leaders of the working class have preached with a success that adversity has never succeeded in annulling, the doctrine that only a complete transformation of existing industrial society can remove the miseries of the proletariat; that reforms, however plausible, however

[1] Weill, *Histoire du Mouvement Social en France*, 2nd Ed., p. 505.

alluring, do but serve to perpetuate its exploitation. Nor have they hesitated to use the opportunities which circumstances threw in their path, of putting into application the theories they professed. In the upheaval of 1848, as in the Commune of 1871, the spirit of Revolution was embodied in action, and the people of France realised more vividly than was consistent with comfort, that the Socialist and Labour movement constituted a serious menace to the peace of capitalistic society. Unfortunately for the militants, the terror aroused by these unsuccessful experiments in Socialism created an atmosphere in which revolutionism had but little chance for growth. The repressive measures undertaken by Louis Napoleon, both as President and as Emperor, and the paternalism whereby he sought to replace the independent development of working-class institutions, alike contributed to administer a severe set-back to militant Labour, and to Socialism in general. Even more disastrous was the effect of the Commune. Not only did the movement itself end in disaster, but among the working classes, their leaders either killed, exiled or imprisoned, the rank and file crushed under the reaction which followed, there was spread a demoralisation, in which the very idea of revolution seems to have perished. The repressive measures of the National Assembly had illustrated with peculiar vividness that revolutionary action finds justification only in success, and the mass of labourers, disgusted with violence and with politics in general, turned to more moderate courses. Even strikes ceased to allure. True it is that in the industrial stringency which followed the war, a number of strikes were precipitated in certain trades; but they were unsuccessful, the employers and the Government joining in their repression, and the only result was to confirm the opinion that seemed to pervade labour circles, that strikes brought much misery and little profit. In the absence of the stimulus which the enthusiasm of their lost leaders had supplied, the workers asked but for the right of associa-

tion, and hoped to find in Working-men's Co-operation a remedy for the evils of the wage system.

Legally, however, associations, even of the most moderate tendencies, to advance the peculiar interests of the labouring classes had no right to exist. Since the time of the French Revolution the law had consistently refused recognition to " corporations " either of employers or of employés, and by Article 29 of the Penal Code associations of more than twenty persons, whether for religious, literary, political or any other purposes, were forbidden.[1] Fortunately the law was lax. Public opinion deprecated its enforcement. Friends of the labouring classes looked with favour on any reasonable and moderate efforts to improve industrial conditions. It was felt by many that the labourers, particularly of Paris, inflamed as they were by the events of 1871, could not with impunity be prevented from indulging in some form of union. In political circles, Republicans in general, partly from sentiment, partly in order to capture the Labour vote, to some extent also because they hoped by this means to find a substitute for strikes, persistently recommended associations of wage-earners. They even reproved the masses for their negligence in the formation of unions, when the laxness of the law and the complacency of the officials made their task easy if not legitimate.[2]

As a matter of fact the labourers scarcely deserved the reproach. Supported by public opinion, they revived a movement of association which had existed even in the days of Napoleon III, and which now found its expression in a considerable growth of unions similar to the trade unions of the English-speaking world. Workers in the same craft, driven by inexorable necessity to the common discussion of common interests, united to form what were at first designated as " Chambres syndicales," and afterwards, towards 1880, by the more familar name of " Syndicats." To evade the law the workers took

[1] Seilhac, *Syndicats ouvriers, fédérations, bourses du travail*, p. 64.
[2] Weill, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

refuge in a subterfuge. While for all practical purposes the association was open to and formed by the whole body of workers in the craft, the law forbidding associations of twenty persons or more made it necessary that its business be handed over to a small permanent committee, which should represent the workers before the Government and the public. It was this committee (usually composed of eighteen members) which was the legal syndicat. It carried on the affairs of the union, and held the meetings, which, because of its limited membership, the police had no means of preventing. At the same time, in order to keep in touch with the action of their delegates, all the workers of the craft met together every other month, such reunions being winked at by the law as being too intermittent to be considered as anything more than casual gatherings.[1]

With this concession, however, the limits of forbearance were reached. Although, if the Labour movement was not to stagnate, if, indeed, it was to convey any very serious benefit to the wage-earners, some larger and more ambitious form of association uniting local unions in, say, a National Federation, was well-nigh indispensable, any attempts to enlarge the field of union were rigorously suppressed by the police. In 1872, for instance, a Federation of syndicats was actually started. It was proposed to discuss matters of common interest—apprenticeship, technical education, arbitration, co-operation—questions on which harmony of opinion was desirable, and which seemed to be completely free from anything likely to arouse the suspicions even of reactionaries. Unhappily, Conservatives in general, still haunted by the dread of revolution, were incapable of regarding dispassionately this attempt at Federation. They spied the red spectre lurking behind this very moderate programme; they suspected the union itself of being a clandestine attempt to revive the notorious International, an association synonymous with all that was destructive. An outcry

[1] Seilhac, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

was raised in the Conservative press which the police could not afford to ignore, and under the pretext that it involved elements of danger, and that its delegates, who, taking the matter in their own hands, had proceeded to hold the first meeting, " had smiled " when voting the required resolutions forbidding political and religious discussions, the Federation was forbidden and came to nothing.[1]

The development of the Labour movement was not thus summarily to be suppressed. In 1876 it took another direction. A more permanent union being forbidden, it was proposed to hold a Labour Congress, where the delegates of the working class could come together for the discussion of the problems pressing for solution. The idea met with favour in labour circles; the authorities, while taking precautions against violence, made no protest; and accordingly the Congress, the first of its kind, was summoned to meet at Paris.

Its tone was distinctly moderate. Politics were renounced. The Congress was closed to any but wage-earners. The bourgeoisie was excluded. For it was the bourgeois Socialist, not the thinker of the labouring class, who had been responsible for the Utopian systems with which people had reproached the wage-earners, who had sought to remedy the ills of the labourer by " ideas and lucubrations " rather than by taking counsel from his actual needs.[2] Believing that the evils of industrialism might be remedied by more modest measures, the representatives of Labour in 1876 had ceased for the time to formulate plans for the total regeneration of society. Above all, in co-operation they declared they had discovered a means whereby the problems of labour could be solved on a purely economic basis. Still much under the influence of the ideas of Proudhon, they saw no advantage in strikes, and expected more from conciliation than from violence. To Republicans, and the

[1] Weill, *op. cit.*, p. 189.
[2] Pelloutier, *Histoire des Bourses du Travail*, p. 39.

moderate friends of Labour, such an attitude gave much pleasure; but revolutionists in France and other lands regarded it with unrestrained disgust. Refugees of the Commune, sheltered in London, hurled violent recriminations at the Syndicalist leaders in a brochure, *Les syndicaux et leur congrès*. They declared it a monstrous thing that, in a city filled with the evidences of the bloody suppression of the labouring classes, their own leaders should thus make amends to the bourgeoisie, abjure the Revolution, deny the Commune. If the Syndicalist movement was to be of any value, it must aim to produce not co-operative societies, but fighting organisations. With capitalism there could be no conciliation; force alone could decide the issue.[1] Thus was heard the distant thunder of those revolutionary forces which were gradually to win back their place in France, and finally to dominate the Syndicalist movement, on which, in 1876, they were heaping abuse.

Two years later a second Labour Congress was held at Lyons (1878), and there, as in 1876, moderation was in the ascendant. The chairman urged that the Congress be distinguished by the wisdom and calmness of its deliberations; the majority insisted on the delights and benefits to be secured in co-operation. But important changes were taking place. The Congress was beginning to feel the influence of revolutionary ideas. In 1877, while the co-operative schemes of the moderates were meeting with little success, when zealous spirits were looking longingly for a new impulse, Jules Guesde, familiar as the eloquent and influential leader of French Socialism through many trying years, founded in Paris a paper, *L'Égalité*, in order thereby to propagate the doctrines of Marx, the theory of Collectivism, till that time almost unknown in France. The new ideas spread rapidly among Socialists of every shade of opinion. The "scientific" Socialism of Marx seemed to exercise a fascination which was irresistible. Vague and unsatisfactory explanations of the

[1] Mermeix, *La France Socialiste*, Appendix, p. 278.

exploitation of Labour were now replaced by the scientific notion of surplus value. The workers were urged to forget the fantastic and Utopian proposals to which the average bourgeois Socialist had accustomed them, and to adopt the principle and practice of class war for the expropriation of the expropriators. There was something practical in the new doctrine, that made it undoubtedly alluring. Class war was something which every man could put into operation; the theory of surplus value as an explanation of the exploitation of which all were conscious, was incomparably more convincing and more apparently scientific than any other explanation that had yet been advanced. A new spirit was thus introduced into the Labour movement. Class war being obviously incompatible with the conciliatory ideas prevalent in the syndicats, it was evident that the Congresses would cease to be satisfied with a programme of co-operation and other moderate methods as soon as Collectivism had completed its work of seduction. Indeed in the Congress of Lyons itself, it having been proposed that the Congress study the means of putting into application the principle of the collective ownership of land and the instruments of labour, 20 out of 97 votes were cast in favour of the motion.

So rapid, however, was the spread of Collectivism, that within a year the cause of the moderates was proved to be hopeless. The Congress of Marseilles, 1879, signalised the triumph of Collectivism over the mutualist and co-operative ideals which had dominated the syndicats. Under the spell of the oratory of Guesde and his disciples, it was resolved that neither producers' nor consumers' co-operative societies could do more than ameliorate the lot of a small number of fortunate individuals; that these societies could not be regarded as means powerful enough to achieve the emancipation of the proletariat; and that the aim of the labouring classes must be the collective ownership of land and the

[1] *Séances du congrès ouvrier*, 1878, p. 7.

instruments of labour.[1] Nor was this all. Determined to secure his victory in a more permanent form than in the mere voting of resolutions, convinced at the same time that Collectivism could never be achieved in practice through the activities of the syndicats alone, Guesde succeeded in pledging the Congress to the principle of political activity. Now among the labouring classes, since 1871, there had been considerable objection to political activity, for it was a form of action which had brought upon them the disasters of the Commune. Some, indeed, as followers of Proudhon, were hostile to the State as an institution, and not only objected in practice to the use of its machinery for the emancipation of Labour, but in theory inclined to the belief, that, in its present form at least, it was a thing superfluous.[2] However, the objections were evidently weakening with the passage of time, for the Congress of Lyons (1878) expressed the opinion that the working classes ought to be represented in Parliament.[3] At the same time, as not the slightest effort had been made to put this rather academic motion into practice, there was here a lack which the Collectivists, cherishing rather strong convictions on the question, made haste to supply. To Guesde and his followers the conquest of political powers seemed to offer the surest and safest road to the haven of Collectivist society. They were convinced that, if the working classes threw themselves into the political arena with a political party of their own, nothing could prevent them from ultimately controlling the machinery of Parliament, and thereupon by legal means achieving their own emancipation. Surely universal suffrage made the ballot a weapon *par excellence* in the hands of the working class, the great majority of the nation. Surely the common economic evils under which they all groaned, the common econof mic freedom to which they all aspired, gave promise of

[1] *Séances du congrès ouvrier*, 1879, pp. 808–813.
[2] Cf. Pelloutier, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
[3] Kritsky, *L'Évolution du Syndicalisme*, p. 133.

unity such as no other body of voters could hope to attain. In a Labour Party the Collectivists saw vast possibilities. Once launched it would grow of itself.

Accordingly there was organized at the Congress of Marseilles the first of the many Socialist parties in France, the *Fédération du parti des travailleurs socialistes de France*, a Labour Party dedicated to the interests of the workingman; a Class Party, whose functions were to consist largely in the propagation of the principle of political activity and the selection of suitable candidates both for municipal councils and the national legislature. To complete the work a platform was needed. It was promptly supplied. Assisted by the high-priests of Collectivism, Marx and Engels, Guesde elaborated a party programme, a "Minimum Programme," the existence of which was, once for all, to prevent any ambiguity in the attitude of the new organisation. It was pointed out "that the social emancipation of the wage-earners is inseparable from their political emancipation, that to abstain from political action would have disastrous consequences, and that political intervention should be manifested by class candidates (allies of no existing political party) contesting all elective offices." [1] As the Collectivist State was not to be attained in a day, certain immediate reforms constituted the practical part of the programme—an eight-hour day, a minimum wage, accident compensation, progressive taxation, nationalisation of railways and mines, etc. It was a programme which radical Republicans to-day would scarcely hesitate to endorse. In 1879 the demands were revolutionary.

It is to be noted that the victory of the Collectivists was not by any means complete. A minority of Syndicalists, opposed both to the revolutionary sentiments and the electoral practice of the new Labour Party, held out against the domination of Guesde. They refused to accept the Minimum Programme. Even more, at the Congress of Havre, 1880, they voted to exclude from the

[1] Seilhac, *Les congrès ouvriers en France*, pp. 57–60.

deliberations such Collectivists, no small number, as were members of no workingmen's organisation. Compromise was impossible in the face of differences which were fundamental; and the Guesdists, accompanied by the majority of Syndicalist delegates, left the hall to form a congress of their own. With them they had taken whatever strength the Labour movement possessed. The moderate remnant continued to hold its congresses; but the real movement had left it behind, and by 1883 its vitality had become so enfeebled that its annual meetings came to an end from sheer indifference.[1]

Thus unnoticeably was concluded what might be considered the first phase of the Syndicalist or Trade-union movement in the post-Commune period. The Labour movement, indeed, went on; but its Syndicalist characteristics were lost in the political activities of the Collectivists. In the Labour Congresses held from year to year, the economic activity of the wage-earners, the development of trade-union functions as means for the elevation of the labourers, seemed to slip from sight; politics and political actions dominated all discussions. That Guesde and the leaders of the Labour Party, themselves discontented outcasts of the bourgeoisie rather than members of the working class, should in their zeal for politics be blinded to the importance of the syndicats, was not unnatural; and if there were in the Party many militant workingmen, who had no great liking for politics, and would have preferred to develop revolutionary practice in the economic field alone, the Syndicalist adoption of such a peaceful, moderate, one might almost say reactionary, form of activity as co-operation drove them into the arms of the only body pledged to class war, even though that body, Socialist rather than Syndicalist, indulged in the political activity to which they were opposed. Revolutionary Syndicalism there was none; its very name would have been a contradiction in terms. For this early Syndicalism was moderate, conservative,

[1] Blum, *Les congrès ouvriers et socialistes français*, p. 64.

opposed to violence. It leaned towards conciliation rather than antagonism, to social peace rather than class war.

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The Collectivists triumphed over the Syndicalists only to experience all the bitterness of internal strife. Sources of opposition and discord were only too apparent. On the one hand, Anarchists, who had joined the party only because of its revolutionary tendencies, found little to compensate them for acquiescence in political activity; on the other hand, among the Socialists themselves there existed a group, which, though devoted to politics, objected to the authoritative and dictatorial methods practised by the Collectivist leader. Led by Paul Brousse, himself a former Anarchist converted to Socialism, the discontents raised a revolt against the domination imposed by the Minimum Programme. They refused to regard it as a gospel never to be modified; they declared that no programme applied with equal facility to all parts of a country, that local conditions demanded some degree of elasticity; and in language that was virtually a threat they hinted that an unbending enforcement of a "particularist" programme could only result in a disorganisation like that which, from the same cause, had been the ruin of the International.[1] And disorganisation eventually occurred. At the Congress of Rheims (1881) the majority of delegates denounced the Programme, and voted down all the proposals of Guesde and his friends. At St. Etienne, in the following year, the Guesdists avoided expulsion from the Congress only by voluntarily retiring, and the triumphant followers of Brousse launched a new Socialist party, the *Fédération des travailleurs socialistes de France*, pledged to decentralisation and a more accommodating political policy, and supported by the undoubted majority of revolutionists.[2] By his adoption of that federalism

[1] Seilhac, *Les congrès ouvriers*, p. 107.
[2] Weill, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

which, thanks to the influence of Proudhon, had gained a strong hold on the French Labour movement, Brousse secured the support of many working-class militants who might otherwise have remained aloof. And it is one of the prime reasons for the later decline of the influence of the Guesdist party among the workingmen whom it professed to champion, that it attempted to impose centralisation on a class devoted to the idea of local autonomy.

In the meanwhile the Guesdists, retaining for their organisation the old name of *Le Parti Ouvrier*, had by no means lost all power, and they were afforded, moreover, an opportunity to retrieve their position by the somewhat rapid development of the syndicats during the early 'eighties.

The trade unions were passing through another phase of progress. Experiencing, as a result of a series of unsuccessful strikes, the hard truth that an isolated trade union is no effective weapon against the aggression or even the passive resistance of employers, and that some kind of union of unions is quite indispensable; realising at the same time that the death of pure Syndicalism in the Labour Congresses had made impossible this more or less artificial bond between unions of every class and description; it was inevitable that the wage-earners should seek to overcome the necessities of the moment in the formation of those national federations, at the time common enough in England, which serve to unite members of the same craft or profession scattered over the country in local syndicats, and constitute the most powerful bond of union which the labour world has succeeded in inventing. As early as 1876 the carpenters had united to form a national federation, and by 1884 there had also appeared the *Fédération des Mineurs*, the *Fédération lithographique*, the *Fédération culinaire*, and an organisation of the workers in the book trade, the *Fédération du Livre*, destined to become famous as the type of a powerful, centralised, wealthy union with moderate, if

not conservative, tendencies.[1] Such a development could not go on unnoticed. To the Government of the day it was distinctly disquieting. In strict legality neither the federations nor the syndicats of which they consisted had any right to exist. They enjoyed the toleration of the authorities but not the sanction of the law. It was now becoming more and more evident that constant and successful evasion of the law by the labour unions could only breed among the labouring classes an alarming contempt of all law; that the enforcement of the law was an absolute impossibility; and that on the other hand, the withholding of official recognition was encouraging that underground kind of agitation which is always peculiarly dangerous, and sooner or later breaks out in revolutionary and frequently violent activity. Moreover at a time when, under the influence of Collectivism, revolutionary ideas were being propagated with exceptional vigour, there were many who considered it of the most pressing importance to win over the workman from the ranks of revolution, and by timely concession in the form of legal recognition to make them allies of the Government.

It was under the influence of such motives, primarily, that the Republicans, led by M. Waldeck-Rousseau, Minister of the Interior, passed the well-known law of 1884, by which the legal position of the syndicats and their federations was defined.[2] The right of association to advance their economic interests was bestowed, with no discrimination, upon employers and employés. Their unions were to have corporate personality before the law; they could sue and be sued; they were to enjoy the possession of such funds as they chose to collect, and could hold such property as was necessary for meeting-halls, libraries, etc. On the other hand, federations or groups of individual unions, though their existence was permitted by the law, were limited to the merest right of association.

[1] Kritsky, *op. cit.*, p. 174.
[2] Weill, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

They could not appear in courts, nor could they hold any property whatsoever. The legal rights thus bestowed upon the unions carried with them, as was pointed out by M. Waldeck-Rousseau in his circular to the prefects,[1] the authorisation of strikes, which thus became a legitimate weapon in the hands of wage-earners. At the same time, though this indulgence was given to concerted stoppage of work, it remained a criminal offence (and, indeed, an offence in many cases impossible to avoid) to employ menace, violence, or assault, during the course of a strike. It was also enacted by the law, as a means whereby the Government could keep under control the bodies to which it was granting legal recognition, that the syndicats and federations be required to place in the hands of the agents of the State both their statutes and the names of their officials.

Now, however laudable the intentions of its enactors, the law of 1884 gave little satisfaction to either of the economic classes concerned. The publicity upon which the Government had thought it necessary to insist, seemed to great numbers of the members of syndicats merely a scheme whereby it was made easy for the employers to discover and to eliminate the leaders of the working class, those who were most responsible for the antagonism of Labour to Capital, as a general thing the most intelligent of the workingmen. Many syndicats, influenced by revolutionaries, refused to deposit either the statutes or the names of the officials, preferring to remain outside the law, generally tolerated, it is true, by the Government, but exposed, at the same time, to repression, rather than concur in a measure which they considered odious. Among employers, hostility to the act was scarcely less bitter; some objecting from principle to any interference with their personal régime in the factories; others in the belief that the legalisation of the strike was putting a premium on violence and giving direct encouragement to revolutionary activity. Many, in fact, in open con-

[1] Pelloutier, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

tempt of the spirit of the law, continued to "blacklist" such of their employés as dared join their syndicats.[1] The outcome was inevitable. The wage-earners, already suspicious of the conciliatory ideas which the Government was endeavouring to impose upon them, were driven, by the action of the employers, into the arms of the revolutionaries. The proceedings of the Congress of Lyons, 1886, marked once more the defeat of the policy of moderation.

To this Congress came the militants of the Labour movement, anxious to achieve the Federation of which they had not ceased to dream, determined not to relax their efforts till they had secured not merely Federations for individual crafts (organisations which they considered a useful but not a final form of union), but a National Federation which should include all workers. Hostility to conciliation was in the air, and the Congress was easily captured by the revolutionists. It condemned the law of 1884; it approved by an almost unanimous vote the socialisation of the means of production; and it proceeded to create a Federation of Syndicats as a means of warfare against Capital.[2] But the revolutionists who had achieved this notable triumph were as hostile to politics as they were to conciliation.[3] They believed that politics had been responsible for the squabbles which had disgraced the Labour Party; they were convinced that the electioneering zeal of the Guesdists was tending to the neglect of that development of the economic activity of the syndicats, to which they themselves were inclined to attribute a very superior degree of efficacy. Had they been able to make permanent their victory of a day, the National Federation of Syndicats would undoubtedly have been removed from political temptations.

The organisation, however, did not fulfil the expectations of its founders. For one thing it immediately fell under the domination of Jules Guesde and the Labour Party, and was dragged into the political activity which, it

[1] Weill, *op. cit.*, p. 282. [2] Weill, *op. cit.*, p. 264.
[3] Kritsky, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

was hoped, it would have avoided. The Congresses of the Party were invariably summoned to meet immediately preceding those of the Federation, and as the majority of delegates in the one congress also sat in the other, it was an easy matter for the Collectivists to dictate the policy of the syndicats. In the Syndicalist deliberations, indeed, the principal orators were Guesdists.[1] To ardent Syndicalists, fearful of the snare of politics, such an influence could not fail to be unsatisfactory. They objected to a Federation which, in the words of perhaps the most noted enemy of political activity, was made "not an instrument of emancipation, but a nursery for militant Guesdists."[2] They regarded with contempt an organisation professedly Syndicalist, which only succeeded in echoing the political war-cries of the Labour Party. To perversity of aim the Federation, in the eyes of its opponents, added the evil of impotence. Despite its pretensions, it was scarcely more than a name. Between the national organisation and the local councils there was no efficient intermediate machinery. The Federation constituted no real bond, and was incapable of rendering the slightest service, economically, to wage-earners scattered over the country.[3] It was an atmosphere charged with bitterness for those who were at once revolutionaries and antagonists of political action. Whither should they turn? To what organisation could they affiliate themselves? The National Federation was unsound in policy, useless in action; the Socialist parties seemed wedded to the contest of elections. From this impossible situation escape was offered through a new type of organisation, at the time attracting considerable attention, the *Bourse du travail* or Labour Exchange, uniting syndicats of different crafts situated in the same municipality, or locality. The idea of a *Bourse du travail* had been advanced as early as 1845 by M. Molinari, then editor of the *Journal des Économistes*, but though it had

[1] Blum, *Les Congrès ouvriers et socialistes français*, p. 110.
[2] Pelloutier, *op. cit.*, p. 75. [3] *Ibid.*

received favour in the days of 1848, it had perished with many other liberal ideas in the despotism of the Second Empire. In 1887 it was revived by the municipality of Paris. With a genuine zeal to further the interests of Labour, and with the knowledge that of their own accord and at their own expense the syndicats could rarely support that central organisation without which their very existence was precarious, the Council of Paris in 1887 created and subsidized the first *Bourse du travail.* Something more than a mere employment bureau, it was rather of the nature of a working-men's club, with rooms for assembly and recreation, and a library devoted to subjects interesting and useful to wage-earners. The new organisation was a success, for it satisfied a want. The example of Paris was duly followed by Nimes, Marseilles, St. Etienne and Toulon, and by 1892 French Labour could boast of fourteen *Bourses du travail.*

In these organisations the revolutionists, alienated from the National Federation of Syndicats, made haste to entrench themselves. In Paris, where the most active trade unions were of revolutionary if not violent tendencies, the Exchange was for years practically closed to moderate syndicats.[1] For the *Bourses du travail* offered to those who believed in direct action a unique opportunity to organise strikes, and in general to carry on the operations of class war. Moreover, this incipient movement of Revolutionary Syndicalism (for this it was, though the name had not yet become familiar) was materially aided by the support of a new Socialist Party, which, as a result of the steadily growing discontent among many members of the Broussist faction, in 1890 broke away from Brousse and formed the *Parti ouvrier socialiste révolutionnaire.* It must be explained that when Brousse and his followers, objecting to the rigid dogmatism of the Guesdists, had cut loose from the Labour Party, they had by no means renounced political activity, but had rather used their newly acquired organisation to indulge more

[1] Weill, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

freely in the capture of political machinery. And it was precisely because they had carried their accommodating policy to what seemed to many an unnecessary extreme, by allying themselves with Republicans in the administration of Municipal Councils, that those Socialists, who were both revolutionary and opposed to political activity, were led to believe that neither Guesde nor Brousse had discovered the true method for advancing the cause of Labour, and were finally impelled under the leadership of Allemane to form a party of their own. Looking with favour on the activities of syndicats or trade unions rather than of political parties, however socialistic, the Allemanists lent vigorous support to the development and extension of the *Bourses du travail,* and contributed very largely to the creation of a Federation of *Bourses du Travail* in 1892.[1] For not only was unity among these new organisations as desirable as unity among the syndicats, but the pugnacious instincts of the followers of Allemane found satisfaction in a Federation, which would be in distinct rivalry with the National Federation of Syndicats controlled by their enemies the Guesdists.[2] In short, the creation of the new organisation was as much a question of tactics as of the furthering of the interests of Labour.

Unfortunately, from this very rivalry, the formation of the Federation of *Bourses du Travail* in 1892, even if it assured an independent stronghold for militant Syndicalists, carried with it a considerable element of evil, exposing the syndicats to the same danger of disunion as was crippling the Socialists. The National Federation of Syndicats, with its centralising tendencies and its leanings towards politics, and the Federation of *Bourses du Travail,* devoted to principles of federalism and the practice of local autonomy, and defiant of political action, were not mere rivals competing for the favour of Syndicalist patronage; they represented two opposing schools of

[1] Griffuelhes, *L'Action Syndicaliste,* p. 5.
[2] Weill, *op. cit.,* p. 284.

Socialist thought. So far-reaching was the diversity of interests which these bodies seemed likely to perpetuate, that there was only too much reason to fear lest they should once more prove to the world that Socialism suffers less from the attacks of its opponents than from the dissensions among its partisans. Well aware that this state of affairs constituted the gravest menace to the progress of the Labour movement, the leaders of both organisations made praiseworthy efforts to overcome mutual suspicion and hostility, and bring about some form of union ; and for a time it seemed that their work would be crowned with the success it deserved. Events seemed to favour projects of union. In 1892 the Congress of the National Federation of Syndicats at Marseilles, enthused by the oratory of Aristide Briand, had voted the principle of the general strike, a principle which at different times had caught the imagination of the militants. It had been broached in the Congresses of the International, and after having been apparently dead for years, it had been revived as the result of the legalisation of strikes by the law of 1884. Now the Guesdists at the Congress of Marseilles had acquiesced in the formal approval bestowed upon this form of action, seeing in it only one of the revolutionary resolutions customary to such assemblies ; but to many members of syndicats, both in the organisation and outside, it seemed an evidence that the Federation was veering towards direct action and loosing its hold on politics. The result was to bring the two Federations together, for the idea of a general strike had a peculiar fascination for the founders of the Federation of *Bourses du Travail*. The sympathetic relations thus temporarily established were given a further impulse by the action of the Government in 1893. Distrustful of the Labour movement, and reactionary in policy, the Ministry was prepared, whenever opportunities were offered, to check the growth both of Socialism and Syndicalism. And the opportunity was not long in making its appearance. It happened that of the 270

syndicats composing the *Bourse du travail* of Paris, no less than 120 had refused to deposit their statutes and the names of their officials as stipulated by the law of 1884. This delinquency they were now ordered to make good, and upon their refusal the *Bourse du travail* was raided, cleared by force of arms, and closed. The effect was only to advance, temporarily at least, the cause of Labour. Whatever may have been the justification for this proceeding, it was undoubtedly very bad policy, for it served to unite all warring factions in hostility to the common danger. Labour leaders rejoiced in the folly of the Government; it had accomplished more than twenty years of propaganda.[1] While under the influence of this event, a *Congrès Mixte* was held at Paris (1893) and a plan of union adopted.

Unfortunately, harmony achieved under such circumstances was necessarily short-lived. When the anger of the syndicats at the events of 1893 had cooled, the old incompatibility between the two organisations reappeared, and in the Congress of Nantes (1894) all hope of unity was shattered on the perilous question of the general strike. Recognising, somewhat tardily, the seriousness of the principle to which they had inadvertently given their support, realising that the general strike, if given anything more than a mere academic significance, involved a considerable diminution of the value of political activity, the Guesdists had taken counsel and now rallied to avert this new danger. At the Congress of their party, held as usual just preceding that of the Syndicalists, they proceeded to condemn by a large majority the principle of the general strike, piously hoping that the object lesson might have some influence on the decisions of the syndicats. They were disappointed. In the Congress of the Federation the resolution in favour of the general strike passed by 67 votes to 37; and the Guesdists, true to their tactics of abandoning congresses

[1] Seilhac, *Les Congrès Ouvriers en France*, p. 338.

in which they chanced to be in a minority, left the hall, leaving the Revolutionary Syndicalists victorious.[1]

It was decisive. A mortal blow had been inflicted on the National Federation of Syndicats. All strength had left it. In a year or two its congresses ceased, and the Federation of *Bourses du travail* remained the sole living organisation.

"Federation of Syndicats, domination of the French Labour Party, Parliamentary programmes—all these the Congress swept out of existence; its rupture with the theory of emancipation by politics was so complete, one might say so brutal, that the leaders of the Federation of Syndicats did not even consider it their duty to take part in the later deliberations of the Congress—their sixth Congress. They disappeared, taking with them of an association worthy of a better fate nought but a name, to-day fallen into the limbo of history."[2]

This date indeed marks the formal separation of the politicians and the syndicats; the ideals of the *Bourses du travail* seemed to dominate the aspirations of the workingmen, and the Federation which had been formed in 1892 entered on a period of great prosperity. Under the able guidance of Fernand Pelloutier, for years its secretary and afterwards its historian, its numbers increased with considerable rapidity. In 1895 the number of adherent *Bourses* had risen to 34, in 1896 to 46, and in 1900 to 48, with a total membership of 870 syndicats.[3] Here were developed the doctrines and the practice to-day associated with Syndicalism. Determined to avoid the quarrels which were disgracing Socialism, the Federation rejected politics and turned to "direct action," particularly that form of "direct action" known as the general strike. The reforms which Labour demanded must be achieved, not through the electoral machinery, but by the use of the direct pressure which the syndicats could bring to bear upon recalcitrant employers. With this opposition to political activity was coupled a strong antagonism

[1] Seilhac, *Les Congrès Ouvriers en France*, p. 269.
[2] Pelloutier, *op. cit.*, p. 70. [3] Pelloutier, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

to any form of centralisation. The Federation stood for freedom of action, for decentralisation, for local autonomy, for the principle of federalism, for anarchism, as Proudhon understood the term, an anarchism of groups rather than an anarchism of individuals. Fernand Pelloutier, to whom more than any one else the Federation owed its rapid rise, was an Anarchist, and his spirit dominated the organisation.[1] The very committee which handled its affairs claimed no authority over the constituent *Bourses*; it was merely a bureau of administration, a thing of convenience rather than an instrument of government.[2] Indeed, it is probable that the support which the Federation received from the labouring classes was largely due to the fact that it endeavoured to preach and practise principles which, through the lasting influence of Proudhon, had become thoroughly acceptable in the labour world of France.

Thus by 1895 had been developed in the Federation of *Bourses du travail* the two fundamental ideas of Revolutionary Syndicalism, direct action as the means *par excellence* of emancipation, federalism, or anarchism *à la* Proudhon, as the form *par excellence* of organisation.

* * * * *

The Federation of *Bourses du travail* was, however, not destined to enjoy a monopoly of the forces of Labour. There were many members of the moribund National Federation of Syndicats who, while they had objected to the Guesdist influence therein and its unfortunate bias in favour of politics, were yet loath to give up an organisation which seemed to fulfil a useful function. Moreover, the Federation of *Bourses du travail* had its limitations. Such towns or districts as possessed syndicats but no *Bourse du travail* were excluded through no fault of their own from the benefits of the Federation. On the other hand the national federations of craft or industry, such as those of the miners and carpenters, organisations which

[1] Seilhac, *Les Congrès Ouvriers en France*, p. 272.
[2] Sorel, Preface to Pelloutier's *Histoire*, p. 26.

constituted a strong bond between wage-earners and whose interests were too important to ignore, were definitely refused admittance, that there might be avoided the overlapping of representation and the resulting confusion arising from the inclusion, in one body, of unions according to craft and unions according to locality. Finally, there were many ardent Labour leaders who were as antagonistic to political activity as the most militant members of the *Bourses du travail*, who, however, objected both to revolutionary methods such as the general strike and to the anarchist doctrines which permeated the Federation, and who were anxious by the creation of a new body, which should be reformist, not revolutionary, to avoid class war as well as party politics.[1] Such were the various motives of which the combined influence prompted the formation at the Congress of Limoges (1895) of the famous *Confédération Générale du Travail*, more popularly known as the C.G.T. ; an organization which, with no intention of superseding the Federation of *Bourses du Travail*, attempted such comprehensiveness as to include it. It opened its doors to isolated syndicats, to local unions of syndicats and *Bourses du travail*, to federations of craft and industry, whether regional, departmental or national, and finally to the Federation of *Bourses du travail* (if it cared to join). It was to be the guardian-in-general of the labouring classes, encouraging them to fight and win their own battles, and in their own way. Above all, it was to remain aloof from all political schools, being Syndicalist rather than Socialist.

"The political struggle is a periodic manifestation which demands but a momentary effort, and which carries with it so much of hate, of bitterness, and of discouragement. In economic action, where unity can so easily be realized, the results attained would be all the more considerable in that the effort would be persistent."[2]

[1] Sorel, Preface to Pelloutier's *Histoire*, p. 23 *et seq.*

[2] Quoted in Kritsky, *op. cit.*, p. 230. See also Statutes of C.G.T., 1895, in Seilhac, *Les Congrès Ouvriers en France*, p. 287 *et seq.*

Thus were the political Socialists, who had received such a set-back at Nantes in 1894, deprived of what was virtually their last hope of capturing the syndicats by the formation of the C.G.T. in 1895. Both the Federation of *Bourses du travail* and the *Confédération Générale du Travail* were Syndicalist and opposed to politics, and between them they dominated the labouring classes.

For some years, it is true, the C.G.T. had but little vitality; it was far from possessing a strength comparable with that of the Federation of *Bourses du Travail.* The latter had already enrolled the most powerful unions, it rested upon organisations which were rich, active and alive; while the former was compelled to rely principally on the national federations of craft and industry, of which some were undoubtedly powerful, but of which the majority were in an embryonic state, their existence doubtful and precarious.[1] The C.G.T. offered no more potent bond than the interest common to the whole proletariat; the Federation could hold out in reading-rooms, libraries, etc., the inducement of material and realisable advantages. There can be little doubt that, to 1900 at least, the latter constituted the chief stronghold of Labour. At the same time, the comparative weakness of the C.G.T. in its early years did not render it negligible. Once again the Labour movement seemed threatened with impotency, if not disaster, by the presence of two rival organisations, engendering between them, as time wore on, no little jealousy and mutual defiance. The Federation, the older body, refused to sink its individuality in that of another, even though the other chose to call itself comprehensive. Its leaders objected also to the organisation of the C.G.T., which permitted the inclusion of so-called local unions of syndicats, created frequently outside of and in opposition to the *Bourses du travail* themselves.[2] Finally, there was some animosity against

[1] Seilhac, *Syndicats ouvriers, fédérations, bourses du travail* p. 285.
[2] Blum, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

the officials of the C.G.T. Between its secretary, Lagalise, a reformist, and Pelloutier, the Anarchist secretary of the Federation, there existed a personal hostility, which apparently constituted a direct hindrance to harmonious relations[1]; and the revolutionaries among the *Bourses* could not apparently be reconciled to the election as treasurer of the C.G.T. of M. Keüfer, himself a reformist, a leading member of the conservative *Fédération du Livre*, and, as a follower of Comte, an advocate of energetic but not revolutionary action on the part of the labour unions. This somewhat petty hostility even the revolutionary motions in favour of the general strike, which the C.G.T. most enthusiastically adopted in its successive congresses, and which should have been regarded as an evidence of the fundamental harmony of interests between the two organisations, could not break down. The leaders of the C.G.T., realising that the inclusion of the Federation of *Bourses du travail* was so essential that no sacrifice should be considered too great which would overcome the existing hostility, were willing to make, and, indeed, did make concessions. Above all, in the vexed matter of organisation it was suggested that the C.G.T. would be willing to place limits to its ambitions, and include (with some few exceptions) only the national federations, becoming thus a federation of federations. It was of no avail. At the Congress of the C.G.T. in 1898 it was declared with bitterness that Secretary Pelloutier of the Federation had done all in his power to impede the working of what, despite of all, he still persisted in regarding as a hostile organisation; and it was accordingly resolved that the two organisations could get along apart, and should remain autonomous.[2]

Yet at no time was union more desirable. The existence of two rival bodies of this sort was unnecessary; even more, it was absurd. Many syndicats, through affiliation both to a *Bourse du travail* and a national

[1] Weill, *op. cit.*, p. 357, note 1.
[2] Blum, *op. cit.*, pp. 165 and 172.

federation, had membership in both the organisations opened to them, if not thrust upon them. There was no real dissimilarity between them. They represented to a large extent precisely the same body of labourers. Both were dominated by ideas of revolution. Both were repelled by the political predilections of the Socialists proper. Both had again and again expressed in public an unconquerable preference for the general strike as a means for the emancipation of Labour. In short, as a Syndicalist expressed it, it was an organism with two heads to one body, and the multiplicity of directive functions was likely, despite every good intention, to wreck its existence.[1]

Fortunately for unity among the labouring classes, Fate seemed kindly. The harmony which, however desirable and however desired, appeared to mock the efforts of the Syndicalists, was at last attained through the powerful aid of circumstances. In June, 1899, Alexandre Millerand, a prominent member of the Socialist party, was made Minister of Commerce in the Radical Government of M. Waldeck-Rousseau, and the theory of political activity was thus put to the severest test. The most violent dissensions broke out among the Socialists, who, ironically enough, had just contrived to sink their differences in a single *Parti socialiste français*. Divided once more into two camps, they displayed a bitterness of feeling and a fundamental opposition of ideas that made unity for the time absolutely hopeless. On the one hand were those who saw no meaning in Parliamentary activity, if it were not to include participation in the Government when opportunity offered, who believed that the advance of Millerand contributed to the advance of Socialism, and who were determined to give him their warmest support. On the other were the revolutionaries, the *intransigéants*, insisting that collaboration in a bourgeois administration was a betrayal of Socialism, and that Socialists must limit themselves to

[1] L. Niel in *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 38, August, 1901.

opposition, to the function of protest, till the time should come when they could as a body storm the citadel of government. And this was no mere difference of opinion, it was a violent quarrel which disheartened and disgusted the well-wishers of Labour, and succeeded in shattering, for the time, the power of French Socialism, Nor was this the only evil result of the Millerand affair. Millerand was a reformist, an advocate of social peace, willing to win Socialism in instalments, willing to accept temporary benefits in anticipation of and as steps towards the complete revolution ; and this reformism he had begun to put into practice. Laws to regulate the conditions of labour, laws limiting the hours of work, laws for the suppression of industrial disputes, followed one another in rapid succession. At once to avert class war and raise the status of the workingman constituted the very foundation of his policy. But he did not please the revolutionaries. Far from it. They cried down his work as an attempt to turn the labour unions out of their profitable paths, and make them administrative machines at the service of the Government.[1] They shrieked of " democratic peril," and declared they could discover no difference between the work of Millerand and that of the most bourgeois of the bourgeois.

All this was pure loss to the Socialists, but the Syndicalists reaped no little advantage. Many militant friends of Labour who had expected much from political activity were at last disillusioned. Politics had been carried to its only logical conclusion, and as a result of that process they had seen the Socialist Party hopelessly wrecked, and Socialism itself in danger of being transformed into a harmless if radical form of Democracy. The experience was enough. It was to the trade unions, the syndicats, that they turned. Socialists and Anarchists alike, many of whom had for years held aloof from the Syndicalist movement, were driven, as a result of Millerand's activity,

[1] Griffuelhes, *L'Action Syndicaliste*, p. 6.

into its ranks,[1] giving it a new impulse which was soon to sweep away all the obstacles to union which seemed so insurmountable. The offices of the C.G.T. were invaded by the revolutionaries. Socialists like Griffuelhes and Anarchists like Pouget and Delesalle collaborated to overwhelm whatever tendency there may have been towards a policy of reform. And to celebrate the advent of these forces of violence a journal was founded, *La Voix du Peuple*, henceforth to be the organ of the *Confédération Générale du Travail*, edited by M. Émile Pouget, a former Anarchist turned Syndicalist, a writer wielding a brilliant and convincing pen. *La Voix du Peuple* became the tribune of organised Labour, registering its complaints, affirming its demands, preaching the necessity of class war, recording the progress of Syndicalism in its daily struggle with Capitalism and the State.[2]

With such a spirit animating the C.G.T. union with the Federation of *Bourses du Travail* was only a matter of time. The disgraceful dissensions which once again had overtaken the Socialist Party proved an irresistible argument for union, on the necessity of which there were scarcely two opinions. In fact, it was only a question, now, of satisfying the *amour-propre* of both parties. Union was freely discussed in the columns of *La Voix du Peuple*, and eventually a basis of agreement was reached and sanctioned by the Congresses of both organisations in the autumn of 1902. From January 1, 1903, organised Labour in France was represented in a single central body, a Federation of Federations, a new and revised *Confédération Générale du Travail* in which the *Bourses du travail* on the one hand and the industrial Federations on the other, though keeping their individuality and rights of autonomy, united to pursue a common policy. And that policy was revolutionary. The C.G.T. was controlled by men who preached the class war, the general strike and anti-militarism, as the chief forms of Syndicalist

[1] Lagardelle in *Le Parti Socialiste et la C.G.T.*, p. 15.
[2] *La Voix du Peuple.* No. 1, December, 1900.

activity. On the other hand the revolutionaries by no means enjoyed a monopoly. There was a section of the C.G.T., not inconsiderable, inclined to more moderate measures. If they approved of trade unionism and not political representation as a method of action, it was because they hoped to make of the unions instruments of arbitration and negotiation rather than of defiance and class war. With them, strikes were favoured only as the last resort. Still further, they had no aversion to political activity as supplementing the action of the syndicats, regarding with favour that labour legislation whereby the condition of wage-earners can be so materially advanced. Between these reformists and the revolutionaries in the C.G.T. there has been since 1902 a practically incessant struggle for domination, a struggle in which the revolutionists have as a rule carried off the victory. During the early years of the C.G.T. there may have been some little doubt as to the issue, but the Congress of Bourges (1904) sealed, for some years at least, the downfall of the reformists.

It is a notable fact that Revolutionary Syndicalism in France owes almost as much to the occasional interference of the Government as to the zeal of its leaders. Every attempt made in official quarters to suppress revolutionary activity has apparently succeeded only in giving it a new lease of life. And this has happened, too, (though not in the case to be described) at times when from natural causes the forces of revolution seemed to be on the wane. The events of 1903 afford an interesting example of this miscarriage of official zeal. In the autumn of that year the C.G.T had commenced and was carrying on with its usual abusive vigour a campaign for the suppression of private employment bureaux, regarded by all true revolutionaries (and indeed by many others) as an unmitigated evil. Its activity from the first was looked upon with suspicion in official quarters, and in the end, during the campaign, the *Bourse du travail* of Lyons, where one of the national federations was holding a rather noisy meeting,

was raided by the police. They, apparently, lost their heads, for in the disorder which followed a considerable number of workers were injured.[1] To add to the rage and indignation naturally occasioned among the labouring classes by this untoward event, there was displayed in the Chamber of Deputies an example of the kind of action to be expected under such circumstances as these from the representatives of Socialism. Fifteen Socialists led by the recognized Reformist leaders, Millerand and Jaurès, united with the majority to reject a motion condemning the violence of the police in the Lyons affair. That there was something to be said for the police was of course generally disregarded. It was an easy matter to persuade the workers that this was the natural outcome both of Parliamentary activity and of reformism in general, whether in Parliament or in the Labour Unions. As a prominent Syndicalist writing in the leading Syndicalist review pointed out:—

"Jaurès with his anti-revolutionary reformism was simply creating among the militants of the proletariat a disgust of all Parliamentary action, of all reformism, and was throwing them back into Anarchist-Syndicalism."[2]

That this had actually happened the Congress of Bourges gave emphatic proof. Revolutionary as opposed to reformist Syndicalism, and the principle of direct action as opposed to that of representation in Parliament, were adopted by a vote of 825 to 369. One might say that it was in the Congress of Bourges (1904) that Revolutionary Syndicalism as a guiding principle in the struggle of Labour against Capital made its début.

"Henceforth," exults Griffuelhes, the secretary of the C.G.T., "henceforth, Anarchists and Socialists, free from all governmental influence, all political authority, will fight side by side, determined to pursue their activity in that field of Revolutionary Syndicalism which is common to them both."[3]

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[1] *La Voix du Peuple.* No. 159, November, 1903.

[2] G. Hervé in *Le Mouvement Socialiste.* December 15, 1903.

[3] *XIVme Congrès National Corporatif.* Bourges, 1904. *Compte Rendu,* p. 80.

CHAPTER II.

SYNDICALIST ORGANISATION.

THE organisation of the labouring classes in France is built up in three distinct stages. The first consists of the individual syndicats or trade unions; the second comprises on the one hand, *Bourses du travail,* or unions of various syndicats in one locality, and on the other, Federations, or unions of similar syndicats in different localities; the third and final stage is formed by the *Confédération Générale du Travail,* a Federation of Federations, whose evolution has been traced in the previous chapter.

1. The Syndicat.

In its chief aspects the syndicat of France does not materially differ from the trade union of English-speaking countries. It is an association to advance the economic interests of the wage-earners who are its members. It consists of the workers in a single craft or industry in a particular locality, and, except in the case of the *syndicat mixte,* does not open its doors to the non-labouring classes. It affords its members a means of offence and defence against employers and, to a certain extent, aid in unemployment and distress. But among the great majority of syndicats mutual aid and benefits of various sorts are comparatively neglected. For one thing revolutionaries, inclined to regard the benefit feature as an attempt rather to adapt the wage-earner to existing conditions than to encourage him to abolish them, as bound up with social peace, and as destructive of the sentiment of class war, look upon them with suspicion; with the result that where such funds are collected, they are not infrequently under

control independent of the syndicat itself, and entirely free from any element of compulsion.[1] The chief reason, however, for the weakness of mutual aid, and in fact one of the greatest obstacles to the development of the syndicats themselves, lies in the hostility with which the French labourer regards the payment of regular subscriptions. His negligence in this matter is quite notorious and is recognised by Revolutionary Syndicalists themselves.[2] As an English trade unionist once found occasion to remark, they are very ready to raise their hands to vote a resolution, but loath to put them in their pockets to settle their assessment. If in times of strike, subscriptions are numerous and generous, when the excitement is over they cease. And many a workman who has joined a union, has been observed to abandon it at the first call for money.[3]

At the same time, though the financial side of the syndicats is by no means their most brilliant, there has been a steady growth in numbers and power since 1884, when they received legal recognition. I give the figures from 1894.[4]

1894	403,440	members.
1896	422,777	,,
1898	437,793	,,
1900	491,647	,,
1902	614,173	,,
1904	715,576	,,
1906	836,134	,,
1908	957,102	,,
1910	977,350	,,

It is to be noted, also, that these figures do not include those syndicats (a considerable number) which have refused to conform to the law of 1884, and have never registered their statutes and the names of their officials.[5]

2. Federations and *Bourses du Travail.*

[1] Pouget, *La Confédération Générale du Travail*, p. 8.
[2] Cf. Delesalle, *Les Bourses du Travail*, p. 54.
[3] Weill, *Histoire du Mouvement Social en France*. 2nd Ed., p. 346. [4] *Annuaire des syndicats professionels*, 1911.
[5] Weill, *op. cit.*, p. 348, note 1.

The second stage in the organisation is constituted by the National Federations, and the *Bourses du travail*, forms of union to which labourers in France, as elsewhere, have been driven by the force of hostile circumstances. It became apparent that the isolated syndicat could exert almost as little power and was exposed to almost as much danger in the industrial struggle as the isolated individual workman, and that if Labour was not to go down before the force of Capital, some kind of union between syndicats was quite indispensable.

It is the function of the National Federations to unite, as far as possible, the syndicats of workers in the same craft or industry, wherever they may live in the various parts of France; although there are trades in which individual syndicats refuse to affiliate themselves to any higher organisation, and others in which there is no Federation to which they could be affiliated. As in other countries, a distinction is drawn between Craft Federations(*Fédérations de métier*) and Industrial Federations (*Fédérations d'industrie*) ; the former consisting of workers generally engaged in the same specialised occupation and producing as a general thing the same object, such as painters, brass-workers, etc., the latter of workers who, differing considerably among each other in their labours, yet work more or less indirectly towards the same ultimate end, such as steel-workers, book-workers, and so on. Industrial Federations are more comprehensive, and contain within them individual crafts, as, for instance, the Federation of Building Trades, which includes crafts of carpenters, masons, bricklayers, etc. Evidently under modern conditions Industrial Federations become more numerous and enjoy an increasing importance. With the integration of industry from the standpoint of Capital, has gone on integration from the standpoint of Labour. Under the necessity of common defence, realizing that the larger organisation was perhaps the only guarantee against capitalistic tyranny, Craft Unions and Federations which have kept apart, and jealously apart, have

come together to form Industrial Unions and Federations. This process has been purposely furthered by the revolutionists, who look upon Craft Federations as narrow, exclusive, and conservative, and regard these divisions between workers, who because of their common labour in a single industry have every cause to unite, as being extremely detrimental to the prosecution of class war. They have consequently endeavoured to crowd these narrow organisations out of power. As early as 1900 it was urged in the Congresses of the C.G.T. that the union of Craft Federations where possible, to form Industrial Federations was eminently desirable, if they were to be successful against their economic enemies;[1] and at the Congress of Amiens (1906) it was decided that while Craft Federations already belonging to the C.G.T. should be allowed to remain, thenceforth only Industrial Federations would be admitted.[2]

The objects of the National Federations are essentially warlike. Primarily, they are fighting organisations. Through their national organisation, they aim to procure uniform wages, uniform hours, uniform conditions of labour throughout the country; to prevent that exploitation of labourers in remote districts which the rapacity of Capital and the ignorance of Labour might otherwise concur to bring about. In strikes, particularly, their importance is apparent. They can concentrate all their funds, all their forces for the assistance of unions in the storm centre, or by the sympathetic strike, by the very extent to which they can dislocate industry, they can make victory more probable. At the same time (and in this they differ most notably from English Federations) their financial arrangements are exceedingly inadequate. Very few of the Federations even profess to supply the various kinds of working-men's insurance. Some sixty-four labour organizations in 1906 had funds for unemployment and were subsidized in part by the State, but of

[1] Blum, *Les congrès ouvriers et socialistes français*, p. 189.
[2] Pouget, *La C.G.T.*, p. 19.

these only three were National Federations.[1] Even for the support of strikes there are comparatively few national funds, collected by regular subscriptions. Revolutionists are fond of declaring that there is a lack of spontaneity about regular payments which is destructive of enthusiasm, and in the case of strikes it is on voluntary and special contributions, spontaneous manifestations of solidarity, rather than on the possession of strike funds, that they profess to rely for success.[2] But it is probable that the real reason for the neglect of Federation finance lies, as said before, in the reluctance of French wage-earners to submit to regular payments, a reluctance, in the case of the Federations, exaggerated by that dread of centralisation and bureaucratic power which is a distinguishing characteristic among the labouring classes. The experience of the English Trade Unions has shown how the collection and management of large funds is dependent not on local autonomy but on strong centralised management. In France itself the possession of considerable funds has gone hand in hand with the adoption of central government, as in the case of the *Fédération du Livre*, and it even seems that strong finance not only leads to centralisation but can scarcely exist without it. Certainly, the majority of French Federations both lack regular contributions, and are opposed to central rule.[3] Thus in the *Fédérations de L'Alimentation, des Cuirs et Peaux, des Metaux*, etc., the type of government is federalistic. Every syndicat enjoys a large degree of local autonomy, every syndicat, whatever its size, elects a single delegate to the Federal Committee, and the delegates themselves are compelled (theoretically at least) to remain in constant correspondence with their constituents, and may be recalled at any time. In short, the administration of such decentralised organisations has no dictatorial powers, and is always subject to popular control in the form of the recall.

[1] Weill, *op. cit.*, p. 353.
[2] Cf. Weill, *op. cit.*, p. 353, and Pouget, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
[3] Pouget, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

There are Federations, particularly some of the older ones, which maintain a centralised administration. Of such the most notable example is to be found in the *Fédération du Livre*, one of the wealthiest labour organisations in France, which is governed by a central committee elected for several years by the whole body of workers, and subject to no recall; a complete abandonment, it might be noted, of two principles very dear to the revolutionists, local autonomy and the vote by syndicat. Another example of centralisation, though of a somewhat different sort, and developed for rather different reasons, is furnished by the *Syndicat national des travailleurs de chemin de fer*, the National Syndicat of Railway Workers. In this organisation not only is central power dominant, but scarcely any local autonomy is granted. In fact, as its name suggests, it is not so much a Federation of individual syndicats as a single large syndicat within which there is no important unit of administration. It is a type born of necessity. Among wage-earners working for the State, or for large private corporations doing business and employing labour in various parts of the country, local unions are obviously of very little value. Centralisation is so evidently necessary to meet the centralisation of the employing corporation, that the exigencies of the situation in such cases overcome the preference for federalism among the workers. In the National Syndicats three quarters of all subscriptions are controlled by the central body, so that the local sections, lacking resources, are obliged to rely on the committee of administration.[1]

The Federations are accustomed to hold congresses at regular intervals, generally every year, and the majority also publish trade journals. By these means is developed and maintained a spirit of solidarity which is vitally important to the efficiency of the Federations in the work of carrying on class war.

In 1908 there were some sixty-six National Federations,

[1] Pouget, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

of which forty-eight had been formed since 1900 ; a fact demonstrating the increasing activity of the militants of late years.

The *Bourse du travail*, whose beginnings have been described elsewhere, is formed by the union of syndicats of different trades situated in the same locality. It forms a central labour union for its own district, and constitutes perhaps the most important feature of the Syndicalist organisation. In the majority of cases, especially in the provinces, there is more in common between labourers in the same town, whatever their trade, than between those of the same trade in different towns. The former enjoy a real community of interest. They have lived together, gone to school together, shared the same social life, been members of the same societies. There exists a natural bond of union, and it is greatly due to the fact that it rests on this bond that the *Bourse du travail* has achieved such success.[1] Moreover, its material inducements give it an advantage over the National Federations. Subsidised as a usual thing by the municipality in which it is situated, it is something more than a mere union of syndicats; it has a permanent abode, in which are the offices of the secretary and treasurer (the nucleus, so to speak, of the organisation), halls for the meetings of general committees and of the various constituent syndicats, and, as a peculiar attraction, rooms for the library and archives.[2] In fact, this varied character of the organisation gives rise to some little confusion, the name *Bourse du travail* being applied indiscriminately to denote (1) the building in which the union is housed, (2) the union of syndicats itself, (3) the administrative body of the union ; though strictly speaking the term signifies only the building or property.[3]

The services rendered to the labouring classes by the

[1] Sorel, Preface to Pelloutier's *Histoire des Bourses du travail*, p. 28.

[2] Pelloutier, *ibid.*, p. 81.

[3] Delesalle, *Les Bourses du travail et la C.G.T.*, p. 42.

Bourses du travail are very considerable; many and varied are the works they attempt to accomplish, though in some cases with but little success. Fernand Pelloutier, for years the Secretary of the *Fédération des Bourses du travail*, whose book *L'Histoire des Bourses du travail* will always remain the chief authority as to their functions and ambitions, divides these services into four classes —mutual aid, education, propaganda and resistance.[1]

Under mutual aid is included the employment bureau, benefits in case of sickness and accident, benefits and travelling expenses (the *viaticum*) for the unemployed. Of these by far the most important and successful, and that for which the *Bourses* were originally planned, is the employment bureau, whereby the supply of and demand for labour are brought together in a common market. As the services of the *Bourse* are in this matter free to its members, a very powerful inducement to join is thus held out to labourers in general. The system, however, is far from perfect. Every exchange has many more demands for positions than positions to offer. But much unemployment has been obviated, and the labourers have been able in some measure to escape exploitation by private bureaux, the charges of which were a heavy burden, and which were suspected of procuring precarious positions in order that their clients might be compelled to come back for others.[2]

In 1900, an attempt was made through the *Fédération des Bourses du travail* to enlarge the scope of its services, and by a national office to co-ordinate supply and demand in the general labour market. The State lent its support to the proposition, and there was established at the *Bourse du travail* of Paris the *Office national ouvrier de statistique et de placement*, subventioned by the government to the extent of 10,000 francs a year. The work of this virtually public institution was to be based on

[1] Delesalle, *Les Bourses du travail et la C.G.T.*, pp. 17–41, gives a summary of Pelloutier from the militant point of view.
[2] Pelloutier, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

weekly statistics as to the demand and supply of labour sent in from the local districts.[1] The office, however, failed to accomplish what was expected of it, and when finally in 1906, as a result of revolutionary activity in the Paris *Bourse du travail*, the government subsidy was withdrawn, it ceased to exist.

In financial aid, the work of the *Bourses*, like that of the other organisations, is deficient. With the funds at their disposal it is impossible to expect much in this department. Out-of-work benefits are very meagre, and in times of any considerable distress speedily exhausted.[2] A small aid, known as the *viaticum*, is granted by local *Bourses* to labourers travelling in search of employment, taking the form sometimes of food and lodging, sometimes of small sums of money, according to the resources of the *Bourse* concerned; but, partly because it is not obligatory, partly because it is open to abuse, the *viaticum* has always been imperfect.[3]

In education the work of the *Bourses* is more effective. Libraries, large or small, wherein technical works, useful to members, appear along with books on the various aspects of the social question, are possessed by practically all. A considerable number offer courses of instruction of a professional or technical nature; a few, more ambitious, are prepared to instruct their members in scientific and literary subjects as well. Many publish monthly bulletins devoted to the interests of Labour. All of which serve a twofold purpose. Not only is the labourer enabled to become more efficient and thus to advance the more quickly, but with instruction, especially in social science, he tends to develop a spirit of revolt against existing institutions, to which, uneducated, he might never be led to rise.

To spread this spirit of revolt, and to enlarge the field of Syndicalism, the *Bourses du travail* carry on an incessant propaganda in town and country. Existing exchanges

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 104–5. [2] Delesalle, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
[3] Weill, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

receive support and encouragement. New ones are created, where before there had been a lack. It is due to the *Bourses du travail*, for instance, that the agricultural labourers, particularly in the Midi, succeeded in forming organisations of their own.[1] Nor has the general propaganda been without a very considerable measure of success. Under its impulse, the numbers in the *Fédération des Bourses du travail* have increased every year. Including in 1892 only 14 local organisations, it could boast of 157 in 1908, with a total of some 2,600 constituent syndicats.

In resistance to the forces of Capital and in revolutionary activity in general the *Bourses du travail* amply sustain the National Federations. During strikes they are the centres where strikers can congregate to discuss their plans, formulate their demands, and gain courage to renew the struggle. If a general agitation is ordered, the *Bourses* are the mainstay of the movement. Of late years, particularly, they have been associated most actively with that campaign of anti-militarism which has come to be one of the outstanding policies of the Revolutionary Syndicalists. In fact, from their earliest beginnings the *Bourses* have been dominated by a spirit of revolution, if not of violence. This spirit, moreover, has at times been the occasion of very considerable embarrassment to the *Bourses* themselves. As has been pointed out, almost all the *Bourses* have been founded and supported to a very large extent by subventions from their respective municipalities, which have bestowed upon them their offices, and have contributed to the expenses connected with the employment bureaux. Now considering that many *Bourses* are centres not only of the anti-militarist and anti-patriotic campaign, but of opposition to the State itself, as it is now constituted, there is something inconsistent in the reception of the municipal subventions. There were many who considered it absurd for the authorities to grant financial aid to organisations whose most

[1] Delesalle, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

definite purpose was, in the long run, to destroy all existing forms of authority. As long as the *Bourses* contented themselves with the organisation of such obviously useful and peaceful services as employment bureaux and professional education, there was no questioning the practice of subsidies; but as they began to be more revolutionary, as they developed and put into practice their ideas of direct action, as they gave themselves more and more whole-heartedly to the anti-militarist propaganda, Radical and even Socialist municipalities took advantage of their situation and began to withdraw the subventions.[1] At Nice, at Bourges, at Bourdeaux, at La Rochelle, the *Bourses du travail* lost their subventions, and with them, for indefinite periods of time, practically all their vitality and powers.[2] It became only too obvious that the *Bourses du travail*, as long as they were dependent on aid from outside, would be compelled to restrain such activity as might be displeasing to their patrons. Unfortunately, the natural method of escape from this unpleasant situation, that is the purchase and maintenance of property on subscriptions from members alone, is one to which the French syndicats do not with readiness lend themselves. Their objection to payments is too deep-seated. Of all the *Bourses* in France which experienced the loss of their subsidies, one only, that of Bourges, was enabled to emerge with powers undiminished.[3]

In certain militant quarters an endeavour has been made to evade the difficulty by removing all revolutionary activity from the *Bourses du travail*, only to revive it in another organisation known as a Local Union of Syndicats. In such cases the *Bourse du travail*, with its municipal subsidy, remains the seat of the costly but inoffensive services of mutual aid and education, while the Union of Syndicats, administered often by the same men, and being, in actual fact, the same body of workers under

[1] Delesalle, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
[2] Cf. Griffuelhes *Voyage Révolutionnaire*. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

a different name, carries on the work of propaganda, a work which is inexpensive though highly efficient, and against which, apparently, the municipality has no means of action. One hesitates to credit municipalities with such stupidity as to be nonplussed by this simple device, but it appears that the practice on the part of the labourers is occasionally resorted to. In these cases it is the Union of Syndicats, not the *Bourse du travail*, which officially adheres to the C.G.T.[1]

The government of the *Bourses du travail* is almost without exception of the federalist type. The constituent syndicats are autonomous, the council which is elected for purposes of administration can be recalled at any moment, and its decisions are not final.[2] A similar system prevails in the *Fédération des Bourses du Travail*, administered from Paris by a federal committee to which each *Bourse* enjoys the right of electing a member, but which is no despotic body with sovereign authority. The individual *Bourses* are quite free to accept or reject its decisions, and neither information nor advice tendered to its constituents by the committee has ever been considered as imposing any obligations. It is to this characteristic, borrowed from Anarchists of the type of Fernand Pelloutier, a man who more than any one else has impressed his personality and convictions on the *Bourses*; it is to this freedom of examination and choice, this faculty accorded to the local units of adapting themselves to their surroundings, that militants are inclined to attribute the rapid development of the Federation.[3]

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3. *La Confédération Générale du Travail*

It remains to describe briefly the last stage of organisation, the *Confédération Générale du Travail*.[4] The C.G.T.,

[1] Pouget, *La Confédération Générale du Travail*, p. 15.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[3] Pelloutier, *op. cit.*, p. 157.
[4] For the functions of the C.G.T., see the Statutes, 1903, and also Pouget, *op. cit.*, pp. 24–35, and Weill, *op. cit.*, pp. 358, 359.

as it is popularly designated, dating in its present form from January 1, 1903, unites in a single body the *Bourses du travail,* the National Federations of craft and industry, the National Syndicats (like that of the railway workers), and such isolated syndicats as are not formed into Federations, or whose Federation does not itself belong to the C.G.T. In fact, with few exceptions, syndicats are not affiliated directly to the C.G.T., but must belong *both* to a National Federation and to a *Bourse du travail.* The comprehensive organisation thus composed consists of two autonomous sections: (1) the section of the Federations of craft and industry and of isolated syndicats, whose functions primarily are to increase the fighting power of labour; (2) the section of the *Fédération des Bourses du Travail,* whose duty it is to carry on the work of mutual aid, education and propaganda. Each *Bourse* and each Federation, no matter what their size, are represented by single delegates, who unite to form the *Comité confédéral.* It is this committee which is the real C.G.T. It meets every three months to discuss affairs of general interest, it takes part in all the events which may affect the condition of the labouring class, it carries out the decisions of the congresses, it issues pronouncements on all questions of policy and tactics in general. In addition to this committee there is a permanent administrative council, composed of the officials of the two autonomous sections, and known as the *Bureau confédéral.*

The financial affairs of the C.G.T. are handled by a Commission of Control, a commission whose duties, in view of the modesty of the budget, can scarcely be very onerous. 60 centimes a month from each 100 members in the Federations, and 5 centimes a year from each member of a *Bourse du travail,* constitutes the sum total of the regular funds in the control of the C.G.T.[1] However, it is to be remembered that these scanty funds serve only to meet the expenses of administration and propaganda, such labour movements as strikes being supported by

[1] Pouget, *op. cit.,* p. 31.

other means. Strikes, in fact, constitute such an important feature of the Syndicalist programme as to necessitate a second commission, the Commission of the Strike and the General Strike, whose duty it is to investigate strike movements in other countries, to propagate in France itself the idea of the general strike, and on the actual occurrence of strikes to lend them its moral support and the encouragement derived from the presence of its delegates. Financial aid, however, it does not pretend to give. This is left to the National Federations, or is supplied by special subscriptions levied for the occasion. A third important function of the C.G.T., likewise carried on by a commission, the Commission of the Journal, consists in the editing and publishing of its weekly organ *La Voix du Peuple*. Though the subscriptions to this paper amount only to some 7000,[1] its influence in spreading the ideas of the C.G.T. is very considerable, and it might be added that since its foundation its influence has been exercised in favour of revolutionary rather than reformist Syndicalism. The harmony and unity which *La Voix du Peuple* tends to foster is facilitated also by the Congresses held every two years under the direction of the *Comité confédéral*. To these meetings each syndicat, irrespective of size, may send a single delegate, and, in full assembly, questions of propaganda are settled, grievances aired, and the general policy of Syndicalism in the war with Capital outlined.

Three features of the *Confédération Gênérale du Travail*, characteristic of Syndicalism, and particularly of Revolutionary Syndicalism, remain to be noted—its opposition (1) to politics, (2) to proportional representation, (3) to centralisation. As a result of Socialist experience, the C.G.T. professes an aversion to all political and parliamentary activity. It imposes no set of political doctrines, no programme like the Minimum Programme of Jules Guesde, to which its members must subscribe. It does not allow its name to be used officially in any

[1] Pouget, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

electoral or political act. Proportional representation is regarded by Syndicalists as the bane of modern democracy. They can see in it little else than a callous repression of the active, progressive, intelligent minority by an ignorant, conservative majority. And they have expressed their attitude in the workings of the C.G.T., the confederal committee being composed of one delegate from each *Bourse* and Federation, the Congresses of one delegate from each syndicat. In both cases mere numbers are disregarded. Finally, the principle of autonomy, as in all the lesser unions, runs through the organisation of the C.G.T. If the two sections, that of the *Bourses du travail* and that of the Federations of trade and industry, unite for administrative purposes, it is for convenience only, for the more efficient prosecution of the interests of the wage-earner. Despite their union in the confederal committee, they remain independent, enjoying the most complete autonomy.

The growth of the Confederation has been both marked and constant since its revision by union with the Federation of *Bourses du travail* in 1902. The statistics are as follows: [1]

	Total no. of Syndicats.	Syndicats adhering to C.G.T.	Percentage.
1904	4,227	1,792	42·4
1906	4,857	2,399	49·3
1908	5,524	2,586	46·8
1910	5,260	3,012	57·1

	Total of organised workmen.	Total members of C.G.T.	Percentage.
1904	715,576	150,000 (about)	20·9
1906	836,134	203,273	23·1
1908	957,102	294,398	30·7
1910	977,350	357,814	36·6

However considerable may have been the growth of the organisation, it is evident from these figures, based upon the statistics of Syndicalists themselves, that it

[1] See *Annuaire des syndicats professionels*, and the reports of the Congresses of the Confederation.

has by no means succeeded in rallying organised labour under a single banner. Indeed the fact that over 60 per cent. of organised labour still remains outside its ranks has led Syndicalist writers both to puff their own estimates and to discount the figures published by the Government. For instance, M. Emile Pouget, editor of *La Voix du Peuple*, and a most enthusiastic revolutionary, volunteers an interesting commentary on the statistics for 1908.[1] He declares that the 2,586 syndicats registered in 1908 included only those which had paid subscriptions to the Section of Federations, and that, despite the rule requiring every syndicat to belong both to a Federation and to a *Bourse du travail*, there were at least 900 which were deficient in membership and belonged only to the Section of the *Bourses du travail*; and that such syndicats were not included in the official reckoning. Taking these into consideration, the numbers of the Confederation would be considerably swelled, and the correct figures for 1908 would be some 3,500 syndicats with about 400,000 members. On the other hand, the statistics of the Government, taken without due consideration as to their value, are apt to give an exaggerated idea of the strength of organised labour outside the Confederation. Of the 5,524 syndicats registered in 1908, some, according to M. Pouget, were actually fictitious, and a large number of others were of small size and meagre vitality. Especially was this true of the so-called *syndicats jaunes*, or yellow syndicats, formed in the interest of employers for the purpose of strike-breaking. For instance, in the Department of the Nord, a very busy industrial district, where the power of Capital is very great, one hundred such organisations could be found, the majority with some thirty members each. To M. Pouget such syndicats are not worth considering.[2]

Such methods of calculation, however favourable to the apparent strength of the C.G.T., can be accepted only with the greatest caution. Though the officials of the

[1] Pouget, *op. cit.*, p. 35. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 12.

C.G.T. are not at all the kind of men to let slip any opportunities for glorifying their organisation, the reports issued after the biennial congresses have quite overlooked this method of enlarging the public statistics by the inclusion of syndicats adhering only through the *Bourses du travail.* Indeed, considering that by the third article of the Statutes the C.G.T. grants the right of such partial adherence only in exceptional cases, it seems unlikely that there should be as many as 900 syndicats admitted under the provision, amounting, as they would do, to over one quarter of the total strength of the organisation; or in any case that they would be of any size or strength. Moreover, if the Government statistics for the total numbers of organised labour include many small and feeble syndicats, it is only fair to add that the C.G.T., comprising in 1908 only 30·7 per cent. of the total number of organised workmen as compared with 46·8 per cent. of the total number of syndicats, commits exactly the same fault. And, in fact, it is well known that the Confederation contains some very small syndicats.

After all, the efforts of M. Pouget are scarcely needed. Including as it does the great majority of important Federations and Unions, the C.G.T. is not driven to reckon its fighting strength in mere numbers. Its extent is broad enough, its embrace comprehensive enough, its membership sufficiently varied to make it an exceedingly powerful weapon against Capitalism, and even against the State. It has made its presence felt in the industrial arena of France. It has created respect for its powers and fear of its activity. Controlled by the revolutionists, it has given itself to the prosecution of strikes, general strikes, anti-militarism, and the general campaign against all the forces of Capital, private and public, with an ardour which, despite frequent and sometimes ignominious failures, has succeeded in carrying along the working classes on the wave of revolutionary activity. For the *Confédération Général du Travail* is Revolutionary Syndicalism in action.

CHAPTER III

THE QUESTION OF METHOD

REVOLUTIONARY Syndicalism is primarily a method of action, of which the aim is eventually to transform the present industrial system into something more capable of satisfying at once the needs of production and the demands of distributive justice. In common with Socialists, Anarchists, and many others who would claim membership with no particular sect, Revolutionary Syndicalists see in the industrial arrangements of to-day only a machinery whereby the labouring classes, the producers of all wealth, are systematically exploited by those who chance to own the various means of production; a system, under which those who are most deserving, obtain from the world's product what is often insufficient to keep them from poverty and distress, while those whose contribution to production is comparatively little, in many cases nothing at all, are able to live in affluence and ease. The whole mechanism of Society—government, justice, education, even its amusements—is, in their eyes, devoted to the interests of a particular class, when it should be placed at the free disposal of every individual in the State. This exploitation of labour, this exaltation of the bourgeoisie, will disappear only with the disappearance of the system itself. So long as the instruments of production are in private hands, the miseries of the working class will continue. They may be alleviated by philanthropic legislation, they may be glossed over by schemes of solidarity, profit-sharing, co-partnership, and the like, but they can never be removed save by the elimination of private

property, together with all the essential features of that system of production known as Capitalism. Far from encouraging industrial equality, the economic system of the present is a system of master and slave; nor can any reform of that system free the slaves from slavery. By revolution only, by the complete and comprehensive transformation of the entire industrial system, can emancipation be accomplished. Until the labouring classes realise the incompatibility of Capital and Labour, until they throw off the last shreds of belief in the elasticity of the present system, until they cease to hope in reform and turn once and for all to revolution, their efforts to raise their economic condition can only end in disappointment and despair. For, if reforms seem to bring immediate relief, they only serve in the long run to fix more firmly upon the labourers the very bondage from which they would escape. Revolutionary Syndicalists are revolutionary just because they display the fundamentally radical attitude which sees no elasticity in Capitalism, no real amelioration except in its overthrow. And it is because of their desire to impress this attitude on the labouring classes that they accept, with all its imperfections, the so-called "iron-law" of wages. Doubtless as an economic law it has little claim to the support of those who hope to be considered scientific—the rigidity of wages is being constantly disproved by facts—but as a vivid illustration of the hopelessness of labour, as a neat expression of the dependent status of wage-earners, it performs a very valuable service. It is, in fact, a "social myth," which, if not realised in practice, serves rightly to direct the thought of the labouring classes, and to keep them from the morass of reformism and social peace. It is a convenient formula, wherein is contained the essential fact that nothing short of a new industrial era can achieve on earth that republic of free producers, which Revolutionary Syndicalists, like Socialists in general, so ardently desire.[1]

[1] Berth, *Les Nouveaux Aspects du Socialisme*, p. 18.

But until this new era shall have dawned, there is evidently an irreducible opposition of interests between Capital and Labour. The industrial world is a battle-field on which two rival forces strive for mastery. To-day is being witnessed the most titanic struggle the world has ever seen, the war of two great social strata—on the one hand the bourgeoisie, on the other the proletariat. And if the labouring classes hope to throw off the yoke of their exploiters, if they would obtain that freedom and equality of opportunity which is the only real freedom and equality, they must face the class war not with fear nor with trembling, but with revolutionary zeal and the ardour of battle; they must bring to the conflict that confidence in their powers which is the mother of great deeds and of ultimate success.

The recognition, not only of the existence of class war, but of its inevitableness, is a fundamental characteristic of Revolutionary Syndicalism. Even more, Syndicalists, in theory at least, profess not only that class war is unavoidable, but that it is desirable, something to be welcomed, a factor in progress, which is to save the world from decadence. The explanation of this seeming paradox is to be found in the relations of Syndicalism to the theories of Karl Marx, whom Sorel and others claim as the originator of their ideas. If there are any logical forerunners of Syndicalism, they are Marx and Proudhon.[1] From Proudhon it has inherited its attitude towards the State, its predilection for certain forms of political organisation; from Marx, this conception of the necessity and the desirability of the class war. For to Syndicalists the doctrine of class war is the very essence of Marx. But while acknowledging themselves followers of the great Socialist, they by no means exhibit that attitude of unquestioning faith in his dogmas which is displayed by so many "orthodox" Marxists. Enemies of moral and intellectual, as well as material despotism, the leaders of Syndicalism, men like Pelloutier or Sorel, were not the

[1] Berth, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

kind of men to invest *Das Kapital* with the infallibility of sacred writings. Nor were they unwilling to take a part in that decomposition of Marxism which began with the attacks of Edward Bernstein on the writings of the "master." Bernstein, a man who combined an ardent love of truth with an irreproachable zeal for Socialism, caused considerable excitement in Marxian circles by virtually proving to the world that many of the statements and prophecies of Marx, as well as many of his ideas on economics, could not be subjected, without irreparable damage, either to the searching light of reason or to the test of statistics, and that only disaster could come to Socialism by clinging to outworn and exploded ideas.[1] Syndicalists, moreover, though unwilling to follow Bernstein into the Revisionism to which his theories seemed to lead him, were quite in agreement with his effort to escape from the trammels of authority. Sorel, in his *Décomposition du Marxisme*, not only admits with Bernstein that the predictions of Marx as to the approaching overthrow of Capitalism were wide of the mark, and that Capitalism shows no signs of giving up its place in and control over production, but he expresses astonishment that any one could have believed Capitalism incapable of directing productive forces as weak as those existing in 1847, when the *Communist Manifesto* was written.[2] To-day, though the forces to be controlled were many times mightier than those of 1850, crises have become of rare occurrence, the signs of weakness are fewer than before. No greater respect is paid to the economics of Marx. As Sorel regards the matter,[3] it is a great mistake to treat *Das Kapital* as if it were a treatise on political economy, illustrated with historical examples. It is not that. It is an essay on the philosophy of history, and if there are developed therein certain economic doctrines, such as that of surplus value, it is only because Marx wished to

[1] Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism.*
[2] *La Décomposition du Marxisme*, 2nd Ed., p. 12.
[3] *Introduction à l'Économie moderne*, p. 36.

throw light on his ideas of historical evolution. By a strange and unfortunate error, these excursions into abstract economics, to Sorel by far the least satisfactory part of the book, have become for the majority of Marxists the very core of the teaching of their master, and have been defended with a dogmatism of attitude which has tended greatly to exaggerate the evil effects of the misconception. If, says Sorel, this dogmatism cannot be broken down, every attempt to regenerate the theories of Socialism and make them acceptable to thinkers, every attempt to bring the practice of Socialism into harmony with its theory, must end in failure. The triumph of the "orthodox" Marxists, regarding *Das Kapital* with the reverence that Christians bestow upon the Bible, accepting in the face of common sense its mysterious dialectic and its crude economics, would succeed in depriving the real Marxism of all scientific interest.[1]

For there *is* a real Marxism, what Sorel calls the "Marxism of Marx,"[2] a precious legacy bequeathed by Marx, which Revisionists, in their iconoclastic zeal, had quite neglected to preserve. This notable contribution, both to Socialistic theory and to human knowledge, is his doctrine of class war, his exposition of the absolute and irremediable hostility between Capital and Labour. If he was wrong in his notions of value, if he was a false prophet as to the near approach of the day when the expropriators would be expropriated, his theory of class war was a divine inspiration. It forms the very essence of the *Communist Manifesto*, and *Das Kapital* is one long testimony to its existence and its necessity. Readers of Marx will be familiar with his almost classic exposition.[3] With the advent of machines in the evolution of industry there appeared, or was made general, a new form of industrial organisation, Capitalism, wherein the most notable phenomenon, from a social point of view, is the

[1] *La Revue International de Sociologie*, vol. 8, 369.
[2] *La Décomposition du Marxisme*, p. 12.
[3] Cf. the *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital*, vol. i.

existence of two great classes, Capital and Labour, the expropriators and the expropriated. And the interests of these two classes are so opposite and so incompatible, that what benefits one must be to the detriment of the other, that no scheme can be evolved whereby, with the perpetuation of the system, they could be brought into even a semblance of harmony. In this, however, there is nothing unjust.[1] It is a situation to which ethical considerations do not apply. Whatever is, is right. It is a stage of historical development, and until it passes and another stage appears, industrial arrangements, notwithstanding all superficial modifications, will remain practically as they are. One cannot quarrel with evolution, though one may, perhaps, hasten its processes. Fortunately, however, Capitalism is working out its own destruction. The ever-increasing power and wealth of the bourgeoisie is creating in opposition to it a proletariat, whose lot in life tends to become more and more miserable, and who are compelled by their very misery to organise in self-defence. Thus they begin to develop institutions of their own, labour organisations, in a way the creations of Capitalism itself. In the end the interests of the two classes become so hopelessly separated that the existing order is impossible, the integument is burst asunder, and the proletariat, its organisations developed by the very process which has brought about their revolt, is able to take charge of the processes of production. Thus the social revolution is accomplished and a new industrial era inaugurated by class war, by the antagonism between Capital and Labour strained to the breaking point.

Obviously, there is the danger that a doctrine such as this should induce among its exponents an attitude of fatalistic quietism. If Capitalism is working out its own destruction, why take the trouble to agitate and organise, why all this Socialistic propaganda, why any effort at all? Nothing, apparently, can alleviate the miseries of labour;

[1] Cf. Marx's *Letter on the Gotha Program* in *La Revue d'Économie politique*, 1894.

they are due to inexorable laws, and will disappear in due time. Let evolution take its course. Marx, however, and even more his followers among the Syndicalists, have carefully repudiated such fatalism. If irresistible forces are working towards the destruction of the present order, active effort will hasten the consummation. "Force," said Marx, "is the midwife of progress"; and to Syndicalists it was the expression of the real Marx, the Marx of the *Communist Manifesto*, the Marx of 1848. A new society is to be born, and the proletariat, by vigorous revolutionary activity, can shorten the agony of deliverance. To his ideas of the progress of evolution Marx added a scientific theory of revolution, a philosophy of force, a theory of intelligent violence as a factor in social progress.[1] But revolutionary activity is an ambiguous term. Did Marx mean political revolution, a catastrophe like that of 1789? Apparently not. He himself consistently opposed political violence, and in 1871 was the first to condemn the rash revolt of the Commune of Paris. But if not in *émeutes* and in barricades, where is revolutionism to find expression? In 1848, even in 1871, no answer seemed to be forthcoming, for economic organisations were yet in their infancy. But on the eve of the twentieth century the solution lies before our very eyes. For what other purpose the great growth of Syndicalist organisations, for what other use the rapid extension of the principle of the general strike? In the trade unions of every industrial country lies the power of revolution which can hasten the birth of the new industrialism. They have a peculiar capacity for warfare, they include only those who suffer by existing arrangements, and by means of the general strike they can wage the war on the field which, more than any other, offers guarantees of success.[2]

Forcing the doctrine of Marx in this fashion into the framework of a theory built up upon the activities of the

[1] Labriola, *Riforme et Rivoluzione Sociale*, p. 154.
[2] Cf. Sorel, *La Décomposition du Marxisme*, section 6.

labour unions, Revolutionary Syndicalists have developed it to its logical conclusion. If it is true that the new era will be born of that opposition between classes which is called the class war, if it is true that every widening of the breach brings the revolution nearer, then every influence which tends to bridge the chasm serves but to postpone the appearance of a new industrial order. Let the intensity of the class war become less, let the acerbity in the relations of Capital and Labour be mitigated, and the new era will be indefinitely retarded. If the claims of Labour can be satisfied by reforming the existing system, then one can but rejoice in the weakening of class antagonism. But if, as all revolutionists assert, only a complete transformation of industrial relations will serve to emancipate the labouring classes, and if, as Syndicalists believe, that transformation cannot possibly occur except in the fashion that Marx has made known, then all true friends of Labour, all who wish a more equitable industrial system, must continue with all their energy to foment the war of classes.

Sorel, in his *Réflexions sur la Violence*, has carried to its logical extreme this doctrine of class war. According to his theory of Marxism, society reaches the point at which the Marxian revolution is ripe—it reaches, in short, its "historic perfection"—when Capitalism, entrenched in a very highly concentrated industrial system, stands opposed to Labour, with its organisations developed to a degree that makes possible the taking over and controlling of all industry; and when this state of opposition has become so fierce as to be nothing less than war to the knife. Whatever tends to retard the appearance of this historic perfection is a hindrance, whatever helps to bring it about an aid to the social revolution. And if the labouring classes can be induced to put all faith in revolutionary activity, if they can be encouraged to develop institutions worthy of this historic rôle, if their syndicats can be continually expanded and improved, they will ultimately be able to take over the industry to-day in the possession

of Capital and become the basis of a society which has had no like in history.[1] But, on the other hand, the bourgeoisie must feel the spur; never should they be allowed to slacken in the fight. However desirable it may be that the labouring classes be active in revolution, it is equally important that the bourgeoisie be ardently capitalistic, that they occupy themselves solely with the business of production, that they be gloriously selfish, and indulge no fatherly impulses of charity. If the forces of industry are ultimately to be controlled by the organisations of Labour, surely it is of all things most urgent that Capital be encouraged in its efforts to reach technical perfection. For so much the more easy for the coming social order will be the process of production. Capitalism, if the revolution is to enjoy the maximum of success, must be overthrown in the very flower of its vitality.

Nay, more, the very progress of the world is bound up with the unrelenting, pushful egoism of the bourgeoisie. To the mind of Sorel the greatest danger lurking in the way of modern civilisation is the danger lest Capitalism should sink into an easy philanthropy, a lazy altruism, and follow the level paths of social peace. For they are paths not easy to avoid. Tempted thither by the blandishments and seductive arguments of Philanthropists, Humanitarians, Solidarists, Christian Socialists, and even of Revisionists, the bourgeoisie only too readily is deluded with vain hopes of removing by social reform all the ills by which the masses are oppressed. But in these comfortable paths lies the destruction of all progress. When the ruling classes and the industrial magnates of any society succumb to the temptation to be altruistic and unselfish, when they endeavour both to ease the lot of the workers and bind Capital and Labour with the bonds of common interest, that society is doomed, it is on the downward road of decadence. Let the social struggle cease, and the country hastens towards its fall. If modern civilisation is to escape the decadence which pre-

[1] *Réflexions sur la Violence*, 2nd Ed., pp. 103–105.

ceded the fall of Rome, it will be through the friendly aid not of Social Peace but of Industrial War.[1] And if the capitalists shrink from the duty which is laid upon them, if they allow themselves to be deluded with policies of reform, it is for the proletariat to apply the spur of violence, and by rudely shattering their ideals of altruism, keep them to their proper sphere, which is production, not philanthropy. Thus will they help to fulfil the Marxian process of evolution.

"Proletarian violence," says Sorel, "is at the service of the primary interests of civilisation. It may not be the most appropriate method for obtaining immediate material advantages, but it can save the world from barbarism."[2]

This theory of the Syndicalists is an evolutionist notion transported to the social question. That society which ceases to struggle ceases to grow. Even more, it begins to decay, for its weaknesses are not now weeded out by the rigid processes of natural selection. Once it was foreign wars which prevented national sloth. But they have become infrequent, and the function which they performed must now fall to the war of classes, the antagonism of Capital and Labour.

Such is the high historic rôle which Syndicalists give to the violence of the proletariat. But it is to be noted that the Sorelian idea of violence is a peculiar one. It signifies no act of physical force aimed to damage the person or property of the enemy, it refers to no barricades, no destruction of public buildings, nor any of the common features of political revolutions. Like Marx, Syndicalist philosophers are opposed to physical violence, to violence, indeed, in the ordinary sense of the term. As used by Sorel, the word is applied rather to any active expression of hostility and particularly to general strikes, which, though the means *par excellence* of putting into practice the antagonism of Labour towards Capital, are, in the majority of cases, quite free from any organised perpetra-

[1] *Réflexions sur la Violence*, 2nd Ed., pp. 105–109.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 120.

tion of actual violence. In this somewhat abstract sense violence becomes an essential factor of Marxism.[1]

Syndicalists agree with Marx in excluding all question of justice, ethics or sentiment from this practice of class war. As Sorel says, it is not a question of justifying violence, but of knowing what is its rôle in contemporary Socialism.[2] Violence may not be pleasant, but it is imposed by the conditions of our industrial system. If the authority of the employer rests on force, only force can destroy it. Class war may even have its disadvantages for the labourers, but it cannot be dispensed with. It is merely the present and actual phase of that struggle for existence by which the world evolves. Why should sentiment obtrude in this process of natural selection? In all this there is a quasi-optimism, curiously similar to that of the Manchester School. Like those economists, the Syndicalists suppose a complete independence between employers and employés; like them they proclaim the doctrine that self-interest, if actively pursued by both parties, will most contribute to the general good; and they agree in declaring that interference from humanitarian motives with this competition of classes will either fail to produce good, or else (and this is more likely) result in actual evil. It is a curious revival of an economic fatalism. But in this latter case, the competition is a competition not of individuals, but of classes—it is, in fact, a war—and classes, by virtue of the organisations of the wage-earners, stand on a footing almost of equality.

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Class war being an essential part of Syndicalist theory, it is obvious that the single object of all Syndicalist practice would be to carry on this class war to a successful conclusion. This brings up, then, the question of method, a question not easily solved, one to which numerous answers have been given, and which has brought about quite distinct divisions between Socialists

[1] *Réflexions sur la Violence*, 2nd Ed., p. 111.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 55.

and Syndicalists. Indeed, among Socialists it has occasioned many grievous and discouraging quarrels, but the majority of active Socialists in Continental countries seem to have agreed among themselves to prosecute the class war by the method of political activity. In France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Holland, Belgium, and other countries, there has gradually developed a political Socialism, of which it is the aim to capture that machinery of the State which, ever since the acquisition of popular government, has been controlled by Conservatives or Liberals or Radicals of one kind or another. Political Socialism, in fact, is little more than the logical development of democracy, of government by the people. If by the extension of the franchise to the middle classes, the bourgeoisie has been able to lay hands upon the reins of government for the advantage of Capitalism, and the perpetuation of capitalistic industry, there must come a time when with universal suffrage, the working classes, the majority of the population of every industrial country, will in turn be able to manipulate to their own ends the parliamentary and governmental machine. If it happens, as it must inevitably happen, that the Socialist vote returns to Parliament a majority of Socialists over all other parties, that majority would naturally proceed to use the powers of legislation, to abolish, either gradually or at a single stroke, the present system of industry with all its evils, and instal in its place either a collective or a communal ownership of the instruments of production. The formation of a political party, and the mustering of the labouring classes to the polling booth becomes, therefore, a great method of action, from which is to result the social revolution. As for the trade unions, to them is delegated the daily task of ameliorating the present lot of wage-earners (in anticipation of the revolution), of watching over their interests in the matter of wages, working hours, factory hygiene, etc. The two forms of organisation, the party and the union, are alike indispensable, but it is to the former rather than to the

latter that the political Socialists look for the ultimate work of transformation.

Now it is just on this point that Syndicalists and Socialists part company. Revolutionary Syndicalists in France during the last decade have repudiated political activity. Their slogan has been, "no politics in the syndicats," and they have carried it out in practice. The *Confédération Générale du Travail* supports the programme of no political party, nor does it invite its members to form a political party of their own. As has been pointed out in another chapter, its attitude is the fruit of a long experience of Parliamentary Socialism. Syndicalists themselves, infatuated by the oratory of Guesde, and disgusted with the moderation of the syndicats, had assisted in the early efforts of Socialism in the political field. But the events which followed served finally to alienate them from such methods, and turn them towards that anarchist anti-Parliamentarism which has ever since distinguished them. They saw "Guesdism" spread only to shatter the unity of the Socialist party on this very question of tactics. They saw the electoral triumph of 1893, but they saw, too, how in 1895 the Democratic government of M. Leon Bourgeois received the systematic support of Guesde and his friends. They witnessed with aversion the gradual assimilation of the Socialists to the atmosphere of Parliament and the State, and they shared in the dismay spread abroad in revolutionary circles in 1899 by the entrance of Millerand into the ministry of M. Waldeck-Rousseau.[1] And so the process went on. A Socialist minister in 1899; ten years later a Socialist prime minister in the person of M. Briand.

Here was Parliamentary Socialism *in excelsis*. This was more than the invasion of the political field; this was the adoption of administrative burdens, the sharing in the government of the existing State. And what had all this Parliamentarism accomplished for Labour? At a time

[1] Lagardelle, *Syndicalisme et Socialisme*, p. 40.

when immense efforts had been expended to make political activity a success, when apparently success had been achieved to a degree scarcely to be hoped for, Syndicalists were beginning to inquire what benefits the labouring classes had derived from these felicitous circumstances. They saw the Socialists divided into squabbling factions, they saw the resources and energies of the labouring classes turned towards the acquisition of political power, they saw their syndicats torn by diverging political opinions, they witnessed the drying up of Syndicalism in places where it had been strong, the sacrifice of labour organisations that political parties might be formed; all this they saw, and wondered what had been received in return. Surely no small reward would be sufficient to compensate the effort expended, the sacrifice made.

But what is the actual fact? According to the Syndicalists, from the participation of Socialists in political power the labouring classes have gained—nothing. The relations between classes have remained exactly the same. The machinery of the State, whatever the changes in the personnel of government, is still the identical organ of coercion at the service of the bourgeoisie. An aristocracy may give way to a democracy, a monarchy to a republic, parties may succeed parties, but the industrial feudalism lives on unchanged, its interests consistently and constantly guarded by the army and the police. If Socialism has succeeded in doing anything for the wage-earner, it has taken the form of efforts to unite Labour and Capital in the bonds of solidarity, of attempts to transform the syndicats into administrative machines of the government, and replace by arbitration strikes, and every active movement of the labouring classes.[1] But this is the end of class war. And if, as the Syndicalists assert,[2] class war is the essence of true Socialism, Parliamentary Socialists are no Socialists at all. If they contrive to legislate in what they suppose to

[1] Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 38, 39. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

be the interests of the wage-earner only by ceasing to be revolutionists, if they cease to foster class antagonism, and thus devote themselves to the promotion of solidarity, they differ not at all from the most ordinary Democratic Radicals. When in 1902 the Socialists, under the influence of Millerand and Jaurès, voted the programme of Tours, public opinion was not slow to note the absence of revolutionism. "This," said *Le Siècle*, "is no more than a variation of Radicalism." "Socialism," wrote Gustave Le Bon, "is becoming synonymous with Philanthropy." And with such sentiments the Syndicalist, heartily and with disgust, agreed. Millerand, as a Minister of the Government, had been compelled to use troops for the suppression of strikes, therefore he differed not at all from the most ordinary "bourgeois." He had attempted by Labour Councils and Arbitration Bills to bring about peace in the industrial world, therefore he was a mere "vulgar democrat." As Lagardelle remarked, the attempt to replace class war by class collaboration is the very essence of "vulgar democracy," but it is certainly not Socialism.[1] And it is just because Parliamentary Socialism exhibits all the characteristics of bourgeois democracy, and none of revolutionary (that is, the only) Socialism, that Syndicalists have been driven to repudiate it. As a means of removing the ills of the labourers it had done nothing at all; as a method of putting into practice the class war it was ridiculous, for its exponents had utterly ceased to be revolutionary.

While practical Syndicalists have, as a general rule, been satisfied with the actual evidence of the impotence of political activity, the philosophers of the movement, notably Sorel and the editors of *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, have endeavoured to discover the ultimate reason for this failure. Why is it that Parliamentary Socialists have succeeded so little in altering the relations of the industrial classes? Why is the atmosphere of Parlia-

[1] *Enquête sur la grève générale*, p. 125, note 1.

ments so deadly for ideas of revolution and class antagonism?

One reason for the failure of Parliamentary Socialism lies in the inability of its leaders to realise the difference between an economic "class" and a political "party," in their belief that the Syndicalist organisations on the one hand and the Socialist party on the other constitute but two phases of one and the same movement. Between a party and a class there is all the difference between something shifting and ephemeral and an organisation which rests on permanent and solid foundations. Consider the nature of a political Socialist party. The only bond of union between its members, in fact the sole condition imposed upon them, is a belief in certain doctrines, particularly the doctrine that there must be brought about certain fundamental changes in the industrial system, whereby Labour will be given a more honourable and more desirable status. To such a body may belong individuals of every kind, not only wage-earners, but capitalists themselves, landlords living on unearned rents, professional men and "intellectuals"; a motley crowd, whose gathering together is made possible from the very fact that the bond of union is purely intellectual, not material (for no common material interest could exist among such a variety of types).[1] They act in harmony, not because they feel in a physical and personal sense the miseries of the exploited, but because they believe as thinkers that Labour ought not to be exploited. But among them are many whose material interests are diametrically opposed to those of Labour, and however much such men may in theory support the emancipation of the labourers, it is not to be expected, the nature of the bourgeoisie being what it is, that when it comes to actual sacrifice, they will allow those interests to be irretrievably damaged by what would happen if their theories were put in practice. The real test of a bourgeois is not his theories but his material interests.

[1] Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

The capitalist and the landlord and every other bourgeois remain what they are, whatever their intellectual ideas. They are too intimately bound up with the system to be revolutionaries. Along with these bourgeois Socialists, bound to the cause of Labour, in opposition to their material interests, by the fragile bonds of theory, are the "intellectuals"—doctors, lawyers, professors, journalists and students—men of no economic class, "the intellectual proletariat," as Sorel calls them, who exercise in every party, from their very capacity for politics, a predominating influence, and on whom Syndicalists look with peculiar suspicion and fear. What have "intellectuals" in common with the proletariat? Nothing. They enter political parties, Socialist as well as any other, because politics is their hobby, their peculiar field, because they wish to advance their own selfish interests. If they form a part of the Socialist party, it is because they hope thus to obtain the guidance of the proletarian movement, to impose upon it their authority and manipulate it to their own advantage. From such auxiliaries the labouring classes would have nothing whatever to gain. They would be submitted to a rigid discipline, they would remain incapable of governing themselves. In short, their exploitation would continue; for, as has always been the case, everything is dominated by the interests of the non-producer.[1]

Such is the nature of a political party. Controlled by "intellectuals" and bourgeois Socialists, it can be of no permanent advantage to the proletariat. The intimate needs of the labouring classes, their characteristics, their ambitions, remain, alike, comparatively unknown to those who have shared neither the burdens of production nor the grievances of the exploited. Even with the best intentions, a party can only end in comparative impotence.

[1] Sorel, *L'Avenir socialiste des syndicats*, 2nd Ed., p. xiv. *et seq.*

It is interesting to note this attack on the "intellectual" Socialists by one who, himself, is nothing if not an "intellectual."

A *class*, on the other hand, has all the force which flows from an innate harmony of interests. The whole body, which we call the labouring class, is distinguished by a common characteristic more potent than any "ideology." All its members are labourers, all produce, all experience in a material way the evils of the existing industrialism. The bond of intellectual agreement is replaced by the bond of material interests. The labouring class includes only labourers, and labourers only *quâ* labourers. Before a common necessity, differences of religious, political and philosophical opinion disappear. Unessentials are cast away, the individual takes his place in his class a labouring man alone. The social division, which we call a class, is a living permanent body, because the material interests of all its members are bound up with the destruction of the capitalistic system of industry. Thus it is that the syndicats, being class and not party organisations, must be the salvation of the proletariat.[1] And it is in failing to recognise this very vital truth that Parliamentary Socialists have been precipitated into exceedingly unprofitable courses.

In a more profound manner the error of the Parliamentary Socialists lies in a fundamental misconception as to the nature of the State, and its various forms of legislative and administrative machinery. Instead of perceiving the intimate relation which exists and must exist between the political and economic systems, they have approached the State and Parliament as if they were something above and outside the industrial world, something which could be grasped as independent agents, and manipulated to effect changes in the social and economic order. If in the hands of the bourgeoisie the State is made to carry out the function of coercion, and keep the labourers in submission, it will be similarly used by the labourers, in their turn, to break the tyranny of the capitalistic system. In either case the State is regarded as an intermediary. Through it the struggle of Capital and Labour will be

[1] Lagardelle, *Le parti socialiste et la C.G.T.*, pp. 19, 20.

carried on and fought to a finish, and the party which can control it will ultimately carry off the victory.

"In the hands of the capitalists, it crushes the workers; in the hands of the workers, it will break Capitalism . . . And the social groups have no power of their own; capitalists and labourers have no force but what the State bestows upon them; they are passive beings, minors, whom the State protects or oppresses, enslaves or emancipates." [1]

But is the State a neutral agent such as the Parliamentary Socialists conceive it? Can it ever be controlled by the labouring classes? Is it something apart, having no vital connection with the industrial system? If it were, perhaps Parliamentary Socialism would have a reasonable chance of success. But is it not just because the State is no such superior independent agent that political methods have resulted in such a complete failure? Socialists might have been saved much trouble had they taken heed of the teaching of historic materialism, or the materialistic conception of history. For they would have learned that there is an intimate connection between the economic and political systems of every age, that the forms of government coincide with, and are in fact determined by, the existing economic order. If, then, there exists, as to-day, a capitalistic system of industry, the political machinery which accompanies it will be peculiarly fitted to accompany it, nay more, it will be peculiarly fitted to sustain it; and if in some future age a new system of industry is evolved, the form of government will change in similar fashion. Whether this be the result of evolutionary forces and of an inner harmony in the social order, which adapts the political to the economic machinery, or whether the form of government follows the industrial order simply from the fact that those who control the latter are able to lay hands on the former, matters but little. It is sufficient that the relationship exists. What we call the State is a form of political government which corresponds to the capitalistic era,

[1] Berth, *Les Nouveaux aspects du socialisme*, p. 2

and which, if historic materialism is not to be falsified, must disappear with that era.[1] With its centralised administration and its legislative assemblies it is but the political aspect of an economic system known as Capitalism. It is the quintessence of Capitalism, of the exploitation of the labourers by the bourgeoisie. It is the parasite *par excellence*.[2] In a sense it is only the extension of the capitalistic factory. It is controlled by the bourgeoisie, its administration is centralised, authoritative and bureaucratic, as is the management of the factory. As for Parliament, being but one of the forms in which the State finds an outlet for its activities, it is an assembly under the domination of Capital, where measures are promulgated calculated to perpetuate the powers of Capitalism, where capitalists themselves are peculiarly at home.

The State to-day is, in short, a capitalistic State, Parliament a capitalistic assembly, the army an instrument for the defence of Capitalism, and the fatherland, *La Patrie*, an abstraction devised by capitalists to foster patriotism for what is after all only a class institution.[3]

It is most important to bear in mind this attitude of Syndicalists, for only thereby can be explained both their account of the failure of Parliamentary Socialism, and their desire to abolish the existing State. That Parliamentary Socialists must fail in an attempt to use Parliament, a class institution, for the destruction of the very class which profits by it, and controls it, is, to Syndicalists, obvious. Either their efforts to ameliorate the lot of Labour and hasten a new era will be made harmless through capitalistic manipulation of Parliament and the administrative system; or, what is equally likely, they themselves, in the bourgeois atmosphere of the assembly, will lose their peculiarly Socialistic characteristics, and develop (or degenerate) into ordinary democratic Radicals—a harmless tribe. It is surely hope-

[1] Sorel, *L'Avenir socialiste des syndicats*, p. 59.
[2] Berth. *o . cit.*, p. 16. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

less to expect that Capital will permit its own destruction by the institutions in which it is entrenched. Holding as they do the belief that Parliament is controlled and always will be controlled by capitalists, and that every real benefit to Labour is by so much a detriment to Capital, it is impossible for Syndicalists to believe that those capitalists, consciously, would allow to pass through Parliament any legislation likely to alter materially the position of the wage-earner. If labour laws have been placed on the statute-book, if the administrative machinery has been augmented by arrangements apparently to the advantage of the labouring classes, it can only be because such legislation and machinery, while appeasing the discontented, can be made harmless in execution, or even turned to the benefit of Capital. And certainly if one concedes with the Syndicalists that the State is a class institution, and if one believes at the same time that the bourgeoisie are not absolute imbeciles, it is difficult to see any other logical conclusion. If Labour derives any benefit whatever from such legislation, it will be only because of the pressure exerted on the capitalists or the Government by the labour organisations themselves.[1] But this pressure might have been exerted outside in the first place, instead of wasting useful effort in vain legislation.

This reasoning, indeed, seems to Syndicalists to have been borne out in practice. For example, see the working of the Labour Councils (*Conseils du Travail*) and the Supreme Labour Council (*Conseil Supérieur du Travail*), organisations designed to benefit both Capital and Labour, but regarded by Syndicalists as being peculiarly susceptible to the unfair influence of Capitalism. The opposition to these institutions, one might add, arises also from the fact that they put into practice that doctrine of solidarity which Syndicalists oppose as decadent. The Labour Councils, local bodies composed of equal numbers of

[1] Griffuelhes et Niel, *Les objectifs de nos luttes de classe*, pp. 19, 20.

employers and employed, whose function it is to fix the standard of wages and hours for their respective districts, to investigate unemployment, and at times to act as courts of arbitration in industrial disputes, have from the beginning incurred the active suspicion of the Syndicalists. They were charged with being unfair. It was hinted that, like Parliament, they were the mere instruments of the bourgeoisie.

"The capitalists will find it to their interests to have in these associations only those with whom they can reach an easy understanding. . . . The Labour Councils will become amiable clubs where they smoke cigars."[1]

If anything, more hostility has been evidenced against the Supreme Labour Council, which is an advisory board to the Ministry of Industry and is composed of representatives of employers' and employés' associations, together with certain members of Parliament, officials, jurists, economists, and so on. In such a council, including as it does many who are strangers to the industrial world, the representatives of the labourers feel themselves at a very considerable disadvantage. The two parties present are not on an equal footing; the single fact that the labour delegation has issued from its native element to collaborate with a bourgeois delegation operating in its own peculiar sphere, places the former in a position of inferiority.[2] The working men feel instinctively, though they may not be able to detect the process, that they are getting the worst of it, that under cover of a supposedly equitable arrangement they are being played with by capitalists and the friends of capitalists. In all this complaint there is, too, the essentially Syndicalist opposition to any effort on the part of the Government to make administrative machines of the labour organisations, and under the guise of Labour Councils or any other body, to dictate what their policy shall be.[3] Such is

[1] Sorel, *L'Avenir socialiste des syndicats*, p. 67.
[2] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 148, August, 1903.
[3] Griffuelhes, *L'Action Syndicaliste*, p. 47.

the attitude of Syndicalism to the Labour Councils. Yet these institutions were regarded with peculiar favour by Millerand during his period of office. No better evidence was needed that Socialism with all its great hopes had fallen a victim to the snares of Capitalism intrenched in Parliament.

If anything was required to render even more futile the presence of Socialists in Parliament, it was supplied by the effect produced upon them by the very atmosphere which surrounded them. Once elected to Parliament, Socialists are no longer masters of themselves. The surroundings in which they move impose their rules upon them. And they must submit, they must play the game, one cannot expect anything more of them.[1] They become infected with what Marx called the parliamentary mania, and in an endless struggle for support lose all effective power to aid those in whose interests they are there. In their endeavour to be of weight in the Assembly they are led to attach themselves to one or other of the great political parties; whence it is but a step to condone insults and injuries to the labouring classes (such as in the invasion of the *Bourse du travail* of Lyons in 1903), lest opposition should injure a trembling ministry. Thus do they subordinate their action as Socialists to their support of a faction. If, on the other hand, they uphold no political party, but insist on uncompromising opposition to all existing forms of government, they experience the weakness and discouragement attached to every policy of mere negation, and are usually influenced to discard their irreconcilable attitude on the ground that otherwise they might do more good by renouncing political activity altogether. It is the natural effect of the parliamentary, that is to say, the bourgeois atmosphere, but it is the beginning of the transformation of Socialists into Radicals or "vulgar Democrats." Even more unfortunate, to Syndicalists, is the result of collaboration in a ministry, the logical conclusion of all parliamentary activity. A

[1] *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, February 15, 1905, p. 281.

Socialist minister, brought face to face with the practical problem of carrying on the government of his country, compelled, as long as he is a minister, to maintain order and security (even at the cost of suppressing the movements of the labouring classes), tends, unconsciously, to become favourably disposed to the use of the machinery of the State as an instrument of administration. If he does not lose all socialistic ideas, he loses at least all revolutionary ambitions. He becomes a State Socialist, impregnated with the atmosphere of existing conditions, anxious to carry over into the new industrial order (if indeed he wants one) all the political apparatus of the old, enlarged and extended so as to embrace the whole social system.

Here lies the supreme danger in Parliamentary Socialism. The Socialist turned reformer, ceasing to be a revolutionary, renouncing the class war, pinning his hopes on the hollow illusion of a new order based on solidarity and social peace, has lost all the essential characteristics of a Socialist. But the State Socialist with his all-embracing State, would perpetuate all that makes the present system obnoxious. It is for the State Socialist that Syndicalists reserve their batteries of abuse. Nothing could be more opposed to the spirit of Labour than the authority and centralisation on which the present State is founded, nothing could be more unlike the federation and autonomy preached and practised in the C.G.T.; yet the State Socialist would perpetuate them.

"Centralised direction of education, centralised direction of production, body and soul absolutely in the hands of the State—it is nothing less than monarchy. To governmentalise school and factory, to declare them the property of the State, as all things, manufactures included, were once the property of the king, is simply to reintroduce the ancient régime."[1] "We are dying," cries Sorel, "of centralisation, and *the* great evil arises from the infection of the workingmen themselves by this spirit of the State."[2]

[1] Berth, in *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, January 1, 1903.
[2] Preface to Pelloutier's *Histoire des Bourses du Travail*, p. 24.

That element of compulsion which makes Capitalism so deadening a force, is not abolished but retained. For the authority of the capitalist is substituted the authority of the State; and the authority of the State, like that of the capitalist, is a thing imposed from without, exterior to the workmen themselves, lacking in that moral and educative, not to say practical, value, which arises from the exercise of self-constituted authority. In a system of State Socialism the labourers would be crushed under a weight of despotism no lighter than to-day. State Socialists, in fact, reduce Parliamentary Socialism to an absurdity. How can they abolish a form of industry by employing machinery specially designed to conserve it? How can they prepare a nation for a new industrial era by the use of institutions peculiarly adapted to the old? A party which believes that only a new social order can solve the problems of labour, but which can elaborate nothing but institutions copied from the past, is useless, its method is unscientific, its action is bound to result in failure. It is the old story of new wine in old bottles. The modern political State can never, under any possible circumstances, take on an aspect suitable to a society of free and equal producers. It was formed to support an utterly different social organisation—an industrial feudalism—and if the emancipation of Labour can take place only through the State as it is to-day, it will never take place at all.[1]

* * * * *

To Syndicalists, regarding class war as the very essence of true Socialism, and the problem of carrying this war to a successful conclusion the first problem which revolutionists must solve, it seems obvious that Parliamentary Socialism is the most hopeless of all solutions. The very negation of class war, it is an impossible instrument for the emancipation of the proletariat. What, then, is to be done? If politics offer no aid, how is the class war to be prosecuted successfully? To this the Syndicalist

[1] Lagardelle, *Le Parti Socialiste, et la C.G.T.*, p. 27.

replies: let the labourers count upon their own resources. They are united, they have their own organisations, their syndicats, their Federations, their *Bourses du travail*, the *Confédération Générale du Travail* itself, let them use their powers to win their own freedom. "The emancipation of the wage-earners must be the work of the wage-earners themselves," was the motto of the International; let Syndicalists adopt it for their own. No words could express more tersely the practice to which they must devote themselves. Why exhaust their powers in political activity, why delegate their authority to representatives who are powerless to aid them, when they have an organisation of their own, devoted solely to the interests of Labour, constituted solely of labouring men, and entrenched on that economic field where the labourers are peculiarly at home? What folly for the labourers to fight their battles on a field adapted to Capital and with weapons with which Capital alone is familiar, when they might choose their own field, their own weapons, forcing the fight where Capital must be at a disadvantage! The institutions of Labour, the syndicats individually and in union, must be opposed to the institutions of Capital. The class war admits of no intermediary. The action of the labourers must be *direct*.

Here is to be found the very centre of the practical programme of Syndicalism. In the phrase "direct action" is summed up all the revolutionary practice of the syndicats.

"Direct action," says Lagardelle, "is opposed to the indirect and legalised action of Democracy, of Parliament and of Parties. It means that instead of delegating to others the function of action (according to the custom of Democracy), the working class is determined to act for itself."[1] "All their policy consists in enlarging their special functions and extending the domain of their activity. They believe in a social revolution, but not through the agency of the old political machinery. For them the general strike is the

[1] *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, December, 1908, p. 453.

revolt of the producers on their own peculiar ground, the ground of production. The Labour movement is a movement of self-direction."[1]

To practise direct action in a Syndicalist sense is, in fact, simply a process of extending and making more comprehensive a policy well known and commonly employed among syndicats and trade unions, wherever such organisations exist. Direct action is nothing new, it is the very *raison d'être* of every syndicat.[2] If better wages, or shorter hours, or more satisfactory labour conditions in general, are demanded, the unions have been accustomed to procure them, not by appeal to Parliament, but by the use of that most common economic weapon—the strike; and many ameliorations of their condition have been won by actual or threatened strikes. But just this constitutes direct action; and if many victories have been won, it was because the field of action has peculiar advantages for Labour. Let this be extended so as to embrace every activity of the wage-earner at war with Capital, so that it becomes the active and constant expression of that war, and every reform desired by Labour, whether it be the local demand of an individual union, or the general wish of a whole labour community, can eventually be secured. By demonstrations, by propaganda, by public meetings, by strikes, and above all by the general strike, the proletariat can put direct action into practice, and so bring about an incessant reduction of the rights and privileges of Capital, an incessant augmenting of the rights and privileges of Labour.[3] But it is essential that this direct action be revolutionary. Every individual case of direct action must have its relation to the ultimate end in view, it must be directed towards the fall of Capitalism. The labourers must be "conscious." Far from indulging in direct action for the purely material benefits of higher wages and so forth, they must recognise

[1] *La Mouvement Socialiste*, September, 1901, p. 331.
[2] Pouget, *La Confédération Générale du Travail*, p. 38.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

in their action the full revolutionary meaning of it, must be aware that they are performing a part in the process whereby the rights and privileges of Capital are being transferred to Labour. For in this transfer of rights and privileges lies all the social revolution, and when the process is complete the new era will have arrived.[1]

Regarded thus every syndical act, if it reduces the rights of Capital, has, whether it be violent or peaceful, a revolutionary nature. Hence strikes and boycotts, though they imply no necessary violence, are acts of revolution.[2] On the other hand, every act which tends to perpetuate the rights and privileges of Capital, or which does no apparent harm to Capital, ceases to be revolutionary, and is to be shunned, even if it be direct action. Evidently direct action is a term applicable to the practice of the most benevolent reformism. Conciliation and arbitration, for instance, joint boards for the settlement of labour disputes, every device to further the solidarity of industrial classes, are, though far from revolutionary, undoubtedly forms of direct action. And Reformist Syndicalists, who vie with Revolutionary Syndicalists in their efforts to control the C.G.T., recognising the comprehensiveness of the term, are quite willing to accept direct action, provided they are allowed to employ it for the promoting of social peace. To this, however, the revolutionists are unalterably opposed. Arbitration and conciliation as methods may constitute direct action between employers and employed, but it is collaboration, not opposition, class peace, not class war. Its benefits will be found utterly illusory. It is the very negation of Socialism. If it might be objected that Syndicalists themselves constantly make conventions with their employers, they reply that whereas reformists put these peaceful agreements in the very front rank of policy, resorting to strikes only as a last and desperate means, revolutionists prefer to strike first and parley afterwards. Whereby conventions be-

[1] Lagardelle, *Syndicalisme et Socialisme*, p. 48.
[2] Pouget, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

come little more than the terms imposed on a conquered foe. It is only thus, they believe, that any real and substantial gains can be made, it being folly to expect that capitalists, if not under the compulsion of a strike, actual or threatened, would grant away any of their privileges.[1] In short, direct action is only revolutionary when it is practised in a spirit consciously hostile to Capital, consciously directed towards its overthrow. Thus every Syndicalist act, however slight, becomes an act of revolution; every Syndicalist success, however insignificant, hastens the advent of the new industrial era.

The problem of revolutionary activity is solved. The difficulty of harmonising the theory and practice of revolution disappears. The daily act, humble, uninspiring, difficult, which traditional Socialism rejected as sterile, and replaced by some final catastrophe in some distant time, is now placed in its proper setting. *All* practice becomes revolutionary. The spirit of revolution is identified with life itself by being manifested in the institutions of the labouring classes, whose daily acts take on a revolutionary value. In Syndicalism there is no breach between theory and practice, they mingle and become one in revolutionary action—direct action.[2] Thus is found an escape from the difficulty, experienced by too many revolutionary Socialists, of reconciling their rather violent theories with practical reality. So long as Socialists persisted in parliamentary activity, the most unrevolutionary of all activities, they could not avoid that contrast of a revolutionary theory and a democratic practice, which brought upon them the charge of inconsistency, and which, partly at any rate, impelled Edward Bernstein to his all-important work of reconstruction. But while Bernstein endeavoured to remedy the defect by changing the theory to fit a democratic and reformist practice, Revolutionary Syndicalists, taking the opposite point of view, insist on making practice as revolutionary

[1] Pouget, in *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 133, May, 1903.
[2] Lagardelle, *Syndicalisme et Socialisme*, pp. 49–50.

as theory had always been. And they were able to do this to their own satisfaction by relying on the constant hostility to Capital of the labour organisations, the syndicats, in themselves the quintessence of revolt against existing society.[1]

[1] Lagardelle, *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, November, 1904, pp. 3–5.

CHAPTER IV.

SYNDICALIST PRACTICE.

I. The General Strike.

The most common form of direct action practised by labourers is the strike. Refusal to work, withdrawal of the labour-force which is indispensable to production, constitutes an application of direct pressure upon recalcitrant employers. To Revolutionary Syndicalists a strike is no *pis aller*, an unfortunate but finally necessary act of hostility, when all other means have failed. It is the natural and desirable expression of the enmity of Capital and Labour. It is the spontaneous and admirable outburst of a class determined to better its conditions.[1] Above all, as has been said, it adds something to the vigour of class war, it takes its place as a contribution to the social revolution; a revolution which is no catastrophe, but a daily process. It is this notion of a strike as a part of an evolution, which distinguishes Syndicalists from the average Socialist. However unimportant and insignificant the strike, it is to be welcomed, for it has its place.[2] Should material advantages be gained, the transfer of rights and privileges from Capital to Labour is advanced a stage. Even though it end in failure, the strike has at least constituted an act of war, it has sharpened the hostility of the labourers to their opponents, it has directed their attention to the ills with which they are burdened, made them "conscious" of their wrongs

[1] Griffuelhes et Niel, *Les objectifs de nos luttes de classe*, p. 28.
[2] Pouget, *La Confédération Générale du Travail*, p. 14.

and anxious to destroy their enemy. Above all it has taught the labourers the practice of solidarity with their fellows, and rendered them more capable of renewing the strife when opportunities are offered.[1]

Regarded thus, every strike, whatever its outcome, assumes a favourable aspect, and (in theory at least) is welcome to the Revolutionary Syndicalist. Hence it is only natural that they should lose no chance of encouraging strikes among all sections of the labouring classes. Carrying on a most active propaganda, a special commission of the C.G.T. devotes its time to the work of instilling into the minds of labourers the necessity and desirability of strikes. The pamphlets which it has issued broadcast, and the appeals which it makes through the columns of the weekly organ of the Confederation, are innumerable. In every number of *La Voix du Peuple* strikes are described with all the expansiveness of enthusiasm, with jubilations for every success, excuses for every failure. Wherever a struggle of importance is precipitated, moral if not financial support is given through the presence of the special delegates of the Confederation.[2] Nor have the efforts of the C.G.T. and its Commission to augment the number of strikes gone unrewarded and resultless. The number of strikes in France, especially since 1903, has rapidly advanced, as the following statistics show[3]:—

Year	Number of Strikes
1898	368
1899	740
1900	902
1901	523
1902	512
1903	567
1904	1,026
1905	830
1906	1,309
1907	1,275

[1] Griffuelhes et Niel, *op. cit.*, pp. 26–27.
[2] Pouget, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
[3] *Statistique des grèves* (*L'Office du travail*).

It has, indeed, been argued that the increase is as much due to the rapid expansion of trade and the subsequent demand of the labourers for their share in rising profits, as to the propagandist activities of the Syndicalists.[1] But in any case it seems to be the fact that an increasingly large proportion of strikes have been carried on by organised Labour. From 1890–1899, the greatest number of strikes occurred in the textile industry, where there were the smallest number of syndicats,[2] but from 1894 to 1905 there was an almost constant progression in the participation of organised Labour or Syndicalists in strikes. In 1894, 40 per cent., in 1905 81 per cent. of the strikes were carried on by syndicats or other labour organisations.[3] Such an advance must have been due to a large extent to the propaganda of the revolutionists.

The importance of strikes in the practice of Revolutionary Syndicalism is vastly increased, according as they are made general and extensive, rather than local and restricted. It is a commonplace, that the needs of Labour have called forth Federations and *Bourses du travail*, and this enlargement of the scope of organisation has not unnaturally been accompanied by an expansion of the field of action. It has become a more and more frequent practice to extend a strike from a single factory to a district, or even to a national industry, or to further the strike of one body of labourers through the sympathetic strike of others; to generalise the strike, in short. Now if, under ordinary circumstances, this practice has no other justification than the hope of making success more sure, by the very extent to which industry is unhinged, and capitalists and the public inconvenienced, among Syndicalists it has a much more subtle significance. For it is a practice which, if extended widely enough, passes into the social revolution itself. General strikes, as we know them to-day, are but man-

[1] C. Rist, *La Revue d'Économie Politique*, 1907, pp. 161–193.
[2] Weill, *Histoire du Mouvement Social en France*, p. 348.
[3] Rist, *op. cit.*

œuvres preparatory to the final engagement. Neither the general strike of a corporation nor the general strike of a locality exhausts the possibilities of this form of action. Beyond them both one sees the prospect of a truly general strike, wherein *all* the organised labourers in *all* the industries of the country might be included. Such a strike, comprehensive, extending to all production, vitally affecting the existence of society itself, a *levée-en-masse* of the workers, is, in Syndicalist theory, *the* general strike. It is more, it is the social revolution. While every strike, local and general, is aimed to procure individual reforms, and thus rob Capital of some of its authority and privileges, the revolutionary general strike signifies nothing less than the intent of Labour finally to abolish the wage-system by which it is exploited. It is the culmination of the class war, the end of a stage in evolution. It is the transformation of society, the transfer of all production into the hands of those who produce.[1] What need of barricades in the streets, what need of the clumsy apparatus of the old revolutionists, when the simple refusal of all workers to work must bring the bourgeoisie to its knees, and compel it to accept such terms as the victors may choose to dictate? The expropriators will be expropriated. They must yield, or they will starve.

It is a notion which has its appeal for the labouring classes. To abolish the old social order by the mere inertia of the workers seems such an obvious and such a simple matter. From their experience of the already extended and powerful organisation of Labour, the wage-earners can readily understand how there might appear, some day, a body including all workers, capable of mobilising them as quickly and effectively as an army mobilises its soldiers. They can see in imagination the great army of Labour exercising in concert its incontestable right to strike, and so by legal means (if one chooses to think of

[1] Griffuelhes, *L'Action Syndicaliste*, p. 32.

it thus) transforming a whole society.[1] The idea is as seductive as it is simple. And it has captured the working classes. The general strike has a firm hold upon them. As Sorel says:—

"Revolutionary workers are all ardent partisans of the general strike; they know that political revolutions stop at that point where politicians believe it is to their own interest to have them stop. In the eyes of the workers, the revolution is simple. They picture a general insurrection of organised trades, arresting the course of business, reducing to impotence the forces of the State, and abolishing all the forms of political administration. The workers think that only their professional organisations will retain their integrity."

The general strike must, however, be something more than a work of destruction. Any attempt to abolish the old order by the "mere inertia" of the labouring classes, could only result in failure, as the Syndicalists themselves are fully aware. The strike *des bras croisés*, the strike of folded arms, popular among revolutionary Socialists of the 'eighties, would be an absurd undertaking, resulting in the starvation alike of capitalists and labourers.

"We are convinced," declared the editor of *La Voix du Peuple*, "that if the general strike were limited to suspending the life of society, it would carry with it great deceptions for the working classes."[3]

So many criticisms have been levelled against the purely destructive aspects of the general strike, that one is apt to overlook one of the most essential features of the Syndicalist programme. Revolutionary Syndicalists certainly propose to abolish existing economic and political institutions, but it is doing them a wrong not to recognise that they have others which they would put in their place. Syndicalism, rightly understood, is something

[1] Briand, in *Enquête sur la Grève Générale* (ed. Lagardelle) p. 95.
[2] *La Science Sociale*, 1900, pp. 329–330.
[3] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 44, October, 1901.

more than a method for the uprooting of the capitalistic system, it is an embryonic form of society from which a new order will be developed. All the institutions of the labouring classes in France to-day are being expanded and elaborated, gathering to themselves more and more of the functions now controlled by Capital and the State, in order that, when the bourgeoisie shall have been expropriated, the labourers will be able, with the aid of these institutions, to carry on without a break all the processes of an industrial society. There will be no starvation. There will be no terrible catastrophe, no disastrous interregnum. A quick and expeditious change, and production, save for the disappearance of the capitalist, will continue as before.

But, it might well be objected, what if the general strike should fail? What if the wage-earners prove incapable of carrying out even the negative work of expropriation? Would not the repressive measures, which the bourgeoisie in their fear would undoubtedly adopt, not only indefinitely postpone the emancipation of Labour, but make its condition more miserable than before? Are not the labourers risking all on a single throw—a doubtful throw? Not so, replies the Syndicalist. There can be no question of failure. In this great economic war the workers will be sure of success, because they will have been trained for victory in the school of experience. Each strike—above all, each general strike—though carried on for the immediate gaining of particular reforms, constitutes in its more important aspect a warlike manœuvre in anticipation of the final struggle. A national strike of any industry has a value as an act of solidarity, and as an education in the carrying on of comprehensive movements of revolt, far greater than any material gains which might be achieved. If by such a strike the material lot of the wage-earner is improved, the fact is undoubtedly a justification for the practice, but in Syndicalist theory this is but a secondary consideration. A Syndicalism that loses sight of high ideals and becomes absorbed in the

gaining of material benefits is in danger.[1] The time will come when it will be satisfied with reforms in the existing system, and to reform the existing system is but to perpetuate its evils.[2] The primary value, then, of a strike is its educative value. By the effort of solidarity workmen are bound together, they become accustomed to act in common for the defence of their interests, they develop class consciousness thereby, and with every effort they become both more capable and more desirous of making another. Above all, they obtain experience for the day when they shall rise *en masse* to assume the direction of production. Every strike, if it is extended enough to affect considerable numbers of wage-earners, is one more guarantee for the success of the final general strike which is the social revolution itself.

Whether the educative value of general strikes is a notion which appeals as much to the average worker as the contemplation of their material advantages, is greatly to be doubted, but among the Syndicalist philosophers who advance the theory, it affords an obvious ground for the enlargement of the scope of local strikes, and encourages them to use both the spirit of solidarity among the workers and the bonds actually existing between syndicats in Federations of various sorts, in order to make strikes as comprehensive as possible.[3] In this their efforts are undoubtedly facilitated by the fact that general strikes are almost necessitated by the conditions of modern industry, by the development of capitalistic as well as labour organisations, and by the equally important consideration that, in the eyes of a goodly number of workers, such strikes seem to offer the greater chances of material advantages. Under the influence of these practical and theoretical impulses, Revolutionary Syndicalists have given an encouragement to large movements

[1] Lagardelle, *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, November, 1904, p. 29 *et seq.*

[2] Sorel, *Introduction à l'Économie Moderne*, p. 11.

[3] Griffuelhes, *L'Action Syndicaliste*, p. 35.

of strike that has distinctly coloured the history of the last decade in France. The dramatic efforts of miners, railway workers, dockers, electricians, postal and telegraph employés, and so on, which have made the general strike famous all over industrial Europe, were undoubtedly engendered by the enthusiastic propaganda of the Syndicalists. How far such strikes have been successful is quite another matter. But it is to be noted that their emphasis of the educative as compared with the material results of general strikes relieves the Syndicalists from the necessity either of deploring or explaining away the not infrequent failures. For in theory, if not in fact, the consideration of first importance is not that a strike has succeeded or failed, but that it has been made, that the effort of solidarity has actually been exerted. When, for example, the general strike of Belgian workmen in 1902 met with disaster, the leaders of the C.G.T. were able to derive comfort even in defeat from the fact that the Belgians had "struggled heroically" and had "performed an act of solidarity." [1] Nor were they nonplussed by the apparent failure of the "eight-hour-day" movement in France, May 1906.

"The action," declared Pouget, editor of *La Voix du Peuple*, "justifies itself; there is no need to seek results. Had the agitation no other effect than the increase of force and conscious power which is the result of action (just as the strengthening of the body is the result of methodical exercise) it would be its own justification." [2]

General strikes then become a "gymnastic," [3] whose value is independent of success or failure. As Sorel remarks, "a failure can prove nothing against Socialism (i.e. Syndicalism), now that it has become a work of preparation." [4]

But to return to the revolutionary general strike, as

[1] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 79, May, 1902.
[2] *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, July, 1906, p. 276.
[3] Griffuelhes, *L'Action Syndicaliste*, p. 32.
[4] *Réflexions sur la Violence*, p. 43.

compared with the ordinary general strike. If the success of the former is ensured by the educative work of the latter, it is also made a practical problem and its advent brought nearer, by the fact that the participation of all labourers in such a revolutionary rising is neither possible nor desirable. If the organisation of the labouring classes had to be so complete as to enable all wage-earners to rise in a simultaneous revolt against Capitalism and the State, the hopes of Revolutionary Syndicalists could scarcely be achieved before the millennium. All that can be said is that the organised workers of certain industries, under the sway of certain prepossessions, will be driven to act, obliging other organisations to follow. The revolution, whatever be its stimulus, will not be accepted by everybody. A minority, that constant efforts of propaganda and action tend to increase, perceiving the necessity, will sustain the revolutionary movement.[1] It would appear, moreover, from the speculations of some of the more practical thinkers among Syndicalists, notably of M. Pouget, that the revolution could be virtually accomplished by the concerted strike of organised Labour in a certain number (and that a comparatively small number) of industries essential to the life of society. A general strike of miners, depriving industry of the fuel which is its very source of life, the refusal of dock labourers to unload and of railway workers to transport coal of any sort, the shutting off of light by those engaged in producing it, and the stoppage of food supply by the strike of those who transport food;—these, if combined, would, almost of themselves, suffice for the social revolution, and the expropriation of the bourgeoisie.[2] For not only would such a movement contain every element necessary for the complete overthrow of existing methods of satisfying the demands of consumers, but its initial success would bring into action many corporations of labourers

[1] Griffuelhes, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
[2] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 33, July, 1901.

whose support can be obtained only through the bold initiative of active minorities.

Indeed this idea of the supreme importance in action of an active minority is at the very base of Syndicalist theory. They not only agree with Marx that every previous revolution has been the work of minorities, but they go beyond him in asserting that the next revolution will display no variation from this apparently established feature. In the worship of majority rule, as practised by Democrats, they absolutely refuse to join. They display the greatest contempt for majorities, considering them but slaves to all the errors and prejudices with which society is cursed.

"Held in ignorance by the powerful, crammed with errors and delusions, exhausted by the forced labour to which they are tied, majorities are sheep-like, unthinking. They accept accomplished facts and endure the worst extortions." [1]

To carry on a general strike, to carry on any policy of direct action, would be impossible for majorities. They lack both ambition and the zeal of revolution. It is upon the active minority that the burden of revolt must fall. It is the active minority which is the deciding factor in all matters of historical importance.

"If it is a question of a strike, an insurrection, or even a simple election, the action of minorities is preponderant. It is the minorities which sow and propagate new ideas, and when the psychological moment is come, goad the inert mass to action." [2]

Just as in the syndicat itself the impulse to all activity is imposed by the competent and militant few, who, without exercising any material but only a moral authority, are able to give the lead to their fellows, so in the general strike certain militant bodies will constitute an active minority, whose revolutionary vigour and moral prestige will draw along with them not only all organised

[1] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 43, September, 1901.
[2] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 24, May, 1901.

Labour, but even the "amorphous mass" of wage-earners in general.[1] Consequently, the fact that the C.G.T. includes only some 36 per cent. of organised labourers (to say nothing of the vast mass of labourers who are not organised at all) does not, in the view of Revolutionary Syndicalists, condemn the social revolution to indefinite postponement. For, quite apart from the inevitable extension of its organisation, the C.G.T. constitutes a bold minority, whose activity in the last decade is a witness to its revolutionary zeal and a guarantee for its success in the final general strike which will shatter the existing industrialism.

The exact nature of this final and epoch-making conflict Revolutionary Syndicalists, unwilling to make predictions as to an event which only circumstances can determine, wisely refuse to describe. When the conditions of production and the relations of Capital and Labour have reached a certain degree of development, the revolution will burst out almost of its own accord. How it will be carried on will depend upon the experience which labourers have had in the art of class war, and on the intensity of their consciousness of the needs and demands which concern their class. The workers must adapt their policy to meet the many and varied forms which Capitalism may assume. Beyond such obvious generalisations, nothing can be asserted. All else is idle prophecy.[2]

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From this account of the general strike it will be observed that practical Syndicalists, men like Pouget of *La Voix du Peuple*, and Griffuelhes, for years secretary of the C.G.T., regard a revolutionary general strike as something which is no mere speculation, but a living issue. To them, as to the majority of Syndicalists, it is a practical end, which with energy and patience can be attained, an event for the realisation of which the workers can strive without fear of disappointment, something of

[1] Pouget, *La Confédération Générale du Travail*, pp. 36, 37.
[2] Griffuelhes, *op. cit.*, pp. 32, 33.

which the advent, though distant, perhaps, is yet certain. Not so the philosophers of the movement. Look into the writings of Lagardelle and Berth, in *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, and particularly of Georges Sorel, in his *Réflexions sur la violence*, and one will lose, in the mazes of their speculation, all realisation of the revolutionary general strike as something concrete, something practical, attainable. Take, for instance, Sorel. Developing the notion of the general strike as far as speculation can carry it, he has made of it a conception so abstract, so philosophical, so immaterial, that one fears lest it escape the ordinary mind completely. For in the reasonings of Sorel the practical issues, which exercise the minds of the militant labourers, shrink into insignificance. Ask him when and how the general strike[1] will take place, and he would reply that he did not know, that he was not sure that it ever would take place, that it would make but little difference, if any, whether it took place or not, whether it were a reality or only a product of popular imagination.[2] The very *idea* of the general strike, propagated with zeal, provokes among the proletariat a revolutionary vigour, calls out all the emotions necessary to sustain the varied manifestations of a war against society, engenders the "most noble, the most profound, the most stimulating" sentiments, developing them at the same time to "their maximum intensity." "The idea of the general strike, constantly rejuvenated by the sentiments which proletarian violence provokes, produces an almost epic state of mind."[3] It is an idea which has been invaluable in engendering that "ardent passion of revolt" which alone can ensure, not only that the class war will be continued till success be attained, but that Capitalism will give itself to that robust, vigorous and selfish advancement necessary to the fulfilment of the process of evolution.[4]

[1] The general strike in this connexion is, of course, the revolutionary general strike.
[2] *Réflexions sur la Violence*, p. 168.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 364. [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 177, 178.

But such achievements do not at all prove that the general strike will ever find expression in practice, nor that the idea, which exercises such influence, corresponds to any reality attainable in the future. Indeed, to Sorel such proof is as unnecessary as it would be impossible. The general strike, he declares, in a phrase which has become celebrated, is a myth, just as the catastrophic revolution of Marx is a myth, just as, in the religious sphere, the Christian idea of battle against Satan is a myth.[1] Great triumphs have been won for Christianity under the stimulus of a supposed war against the forces of evil, but men do not on that account necessarily believe in a personal devil, inhabiting with his auxiliaries the fiery regions of hell. And so with the Marxian catastrophe and the notion of a revolutionary general strike. They represent convenient abstractions, handy summaries, containing the essence of all socialistic practice; but they must never be conceived as events which in the course of time will actually take place. A general strike of labourers in one simultaneous movement is impossible, but it was never meant, in Syndicalist philosophy, to be anything else. But just because it is the logical development of the isolated strike, the natural conclusion and consummation of the most suitable form of action known to Labour, it affords a useful slogan in the class war. If it is only a myth, it is, at least, a logical myth, and in this lies its success. In the words of Lagardelle,

"The idea of a sudden amplification of this daily act which we call the strike, naturally finds a place in the working-class mind. For the worker here is something tangible, real, which not only does not transcend the familiar setting of his life, but which is his very life itself. There is no need of wide theoretic speculations to teach him the effect of a generalised and simultaneous suspension of labour. He has only, by a natural operation of the mind, to multiply the consequences of particular incidents in the daily struggle to realise that

[1] *Réflexions sur la Violence*, p. 27.

in a single moment, by the sole power of concerted efforts, the social war may attain its maximum intensity and the consummation be achieved."[1]

But whether this great moment comes sooner or later, whether it ever comes at all, makes no difference. The daily revolutionary action, under the stimulus of the idea, will still go on, and it is the daily revolutionary action which, if continued, will bring about all the changes in the industrial system attainable by the efforts of the labouring class.

Such an abstract way of regarding the general strike has its advantages. It places it above criticism. As Sorel remarks, "when one takes one's stand on the ground of myths, one is proof against all refutation."[2] If it makes little difference if the revolutionary strike takes place or not, objections as to the impossibility of naming time or place, or of describing the circumstances of the uprising, objections that possibly the working classes will never reach that stage of organisation which would make such a movement practicable, have no weight. Deluded by the zeal with which the notion of a general strike has been propagated, objectors have fallen into the perhaps natural error of regarding it as a practical issue. Ignorant of the philosophic conceptions of Sorel, they have made war against an abstraction, have tried to pick flaws in the practicalness of a social myth!

If the general strike, thus conceived, seems to be somewhat remotely removed from practice, it is quite in keeping with Syndicalist theories of evolution. Revolutionary Syndicalists, determined to place themselves in harmony with science, inclined by nature to adopt the current doctrines of evolution, have never believed in a catastrophic revolution, by which at a blow society would become something different from what it is at present. If a new industrial and social era is to arrive, its progress will be slow, it will come by degrees. Evolution does not

[1] *Syndicalisme et Socialisme*, pp. 50, 51.
[2] *Réflexions sur la Violence*, p. 42.

work itself out in eras and epochs, but gradually. Hence was Sorel led to declare the catastrophic revolution a myth. It did not square with scientific thought. The social revolution, if it is a revolution at all, is a daily revolution. It is being accomplished before our eyes. Every act of hostility to Capital, every strike, however petty, is a part of the process. If one would seek the essence of the social struggle, it is to be found in the endeavour of the working classes *gradually* to transfer to their own organisations everything that is valuable in the organisations of the bourgeoisie, leaving them but empty husks, devoid of life.[1] In the course of time there comes a point when this process of transfer is complete, and the social revolution will have been accomplished. But here there is no room for a catastrophe. The end will be but a summing-up, "the generalisation of all the liberties which have been secured, the final and formal deposition of authorities long since devoid of life."[2] When, by daily class war, the rights of Capital have been worn to a shadow, the act of consummation becomes a purely nominal affair. There will be no violent expropriation, because there will be nothing left to expropriate. The general strike can be exalted to the status of a myth, for the simple reason that there will be no place for it in practice. And yet it still remains an all-important part of Syndicalism. The contemplation of a final revolutionary movement serves as a spur to a labouring class which, left to itself, might degenerate into slovenliness and inaction. And the various minor general strikes, which are regarded as so necessary a part of revolutionary practice, lose none of their educative value, though the labourers need never exercise the solidarity thus acquired in any comprehensive and definite act of revolt. For the work of supplying the needs of society must be carried on, and the unity which the workers will have achieved will be invaluable in enabling them to cope with the processes

[1] Sorel, *L'Avenir Socialiste des Syndicats*, p. 51.
[2] Lagardelle, *Syndicalisme et Socialisme*, p. 49.

of production which, when the revolution is complete, will fall to their hands.

* * * * *

Such is the general strike. In its minor aspects a means *par excellence* for prosecuting class war and hastening the fall of the wage-system, it has become, in its wider aspect as the expression of the social revolution, on the one hand the realisable goal of Syndicalist practice, on the other a philosophical abstraction, a stimulating myth. Originating with the Socialists of the International,[1] handed down by the revolutionists of the 'eighties, lauded by the Congresses both of political Socialists and anti-parliamentarist Syndicalists, its meaning juggled and confused till it came to mean any large strike, from that in a single industrial concern to the revolt of an entire nation, it has at last been adopted as the peculiar property of the Revolutionary Syndicalists, and made the *sine qua non* of the initiate. In it they see a remedy for all the ills and maladjustments of existing industrialism. From it they await the downfall of Capitalism. And philosophers and men of action alike, whatever the differences of their conception of it, unite in zealous enthusiasm over its powers to bring about a social state which will satisfy every aspiration. The general strike has become their religion. "They believe in it as the early Christians believed in the return of Christ. They accept it without criticism, and as an article of faith."[2] Exulting in the notion that not in "ideology" but in action lies all Revolutionary Syndicalism, boasting of their freedom from all the shackles of dogma,[3] they have yet become in their attitude to the general strike as dogmatic as ever were the Marxians in their belief in *Das Kapital.* The infallibility they deny to Marx they have virtually bestowed upon the doctrine of the general strike, their panacea for every economic ill. For those

[1] Pouget, in *Enquête sur la Grève Générale* (ed. Lagardelle), p. 37.
[2] E. Dolleans in *La Revue d'Économie politique*, 1906, p. 447.
[3] Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

who refuse to accept their favourite method of action, or accept it only to limit its scope, they have nothing but contempt. They may not dare to exclude them from the *Confédération Générale du Travail*, but they pronounce a moral excommunication upon them by burdening them with abuse, by stigmatising them as traitors to the cause of their fellow labourers.[1] Thus for the nonconformists of Socialism there is a conformity, for the unorthodox an orthodoxy. Anarchists and libertarians, believers in freedom from authority and staunch defenders of liberty of conscience, they are yet as intolerant as any other variety of Socialists. No movement can free itself of every belief; no movement is devoid of "ideology" and its intellectuals; and Revolutionary Syndicalism is no exception. It reveals a faith in the general strike as narrow and as uncompromising as any displayed by Parliamentary Socialists; and in Sorel, Lagardelle and Berth, it has produced intellectuals and "ideologists" whose speculations are as metaphysical, as abstract, and as far removed from reality as those of any of the "intellectual proletariat" which they affect to despise.

2. Sabotage

If Revolutionary Syndicalists display a marked predilection for the strike as a means *par excellence* of direct action, they are by no means blind to its defects. They know the disasters which an unsuccessful strike brings in its train, they have seen syndicats go under as a result of defeats, they have felt only too poignantly the discouragement which failure engenders. Nor have they been slow to condemn hasty, thoughtless strikes; strikes the motives of which are so petty as to ensure defeat.[2] It is not always convenient, nor even possible, to strike. Grievances against employers and favourable opportunities for redressing them do not always coincide. Many are

[1] Cf. the complaint of Keüfer, *La Voix du peuple*, No. 129, April, 1903.

[2] Griffuelhes, *Voyage Révolutionnaire*, p. 25.

the occasions when sullen submission seems better policy than a strike foredoomed to failure. But if strikes are impossible, how is the class war to be carried on, how is the hostility of labourers to their employers to be kept up to the proper pitch? Syndicalists believe they have discovered a solution. They consider it one of their claims to the support of organised labour that they have elaborated a method whereby, while remaining at their work, labourers can yet resist the claims of Capital, and sustain with vigour the class war. This method has become celebrated under the name of *sabotage*. *Sabotage*, a slang term, signifies, as Pouget remarks, not the act of making *sabots* or wooden clogs, but rather work executed *à coups de sabots*—clumsily, carelessly, without thought or skill. In Syndicalist practice it is a comprehensive term, covering every process by which the labourer, while remaining at his work, tries to damage the interests of his employer, whether by simple malingering, or by bad quality of work, or by doing actual damage to tools and machinery.

Although it has come into fashion as a recognized form of direct action only of late years, one might say in the last decade, the practice of *sabotage*, according to Syndicalists, is "as old as the exploitation of man."[1] "From the day when one man had the criminal ingenuity to draw profit from the work of his fellow, the exploited, instinctively, sought to give less than his patron demanded."[2] Considered more concretely, it was the Scotch worker, with his policy of "ca canny," who first put *sabotage* into practice; and both his policy and his arguments in defence thereof have been transplanted into Revolutionary Syndicalism. The reasoning is simple. If a man wants a hat of which the price is five shillings, he must pay five shillings. If he will pay only four shillings he must be contented with a hat of inferior quality. Why? Because a hat is a commodity, and it is a rule in

[1] For the discussion of *sabotage* in general see Pouget, *Le Sabotage*. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

the sale or purchase of commodities, that one gets only what one pays for. Now it has been declared by employers that labour is a commodity, like any other commodity, subject to similar rules, bought and sold in similar fashion. Good! Then he who buys labour, like the man who buys a hat, will get precisely what he pays for, good labour for a high price, for a low price labour of an inferior quality. If an employer pays insufficient wages to his workmen, he must not be surprised if the work he receives in return is of a rather poor quality. If a labourer hires out his labour, he is not performing an act of charity, but an act of business, to be carried out on business principles. "A mauvaise paye, mauvais travail," cries the Syndicalist. And every labourer who puts this motto into practice is carrying on a work of *sabotage*.[1]

Such a principle, obviously, may find expression in many different ways, and in fact the forms of *sabotage* are numerous. Of these the simplest consists in slow and slovenly work.[2] It is an easy matter for a labourer, particularly if he is paid by the day, to take things easily and give the employer what he deserves. For many, on the other hand, such tactics are impossible. Even under a system of time-wages workmen are frequently prevented from malingering, often, indeed, compelled to "speed-up" by the employment of pace-setters, or by the necessity of keeping up with machines driven with considerable rapidity and with merciless persistence; while for labourers paid in piece-wages, *sabotage* by a reduction of output, involving as it does a decrease of wages as well as of product, does as much damage to the wage-earners as to their employers. In such cases *sabotage* must affect not quantity but quality.[3] Goods are purposely deteriorated, sometimes so damaged that they cannot be placed on the market. Subjected to such treatment, employers are confronted with a serious dilemma. Either

[1] Pouget, *Le Sabotage*, pp. 7–8.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 33.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

they will lose their customers by offering them an inferior class of goods, or they will be at a very considerable financial loss in supplying material and paying wages for production of goods which they can only throw away. But Syndicalists have not stopped here, they have extended far beyond its original limits the significance of the phrase "ca canny." Not content with giving "bad work for bad pay," they have included in *sabotage* (and justified thereby) any damage purposely inflicted, not on the product, but on the machinery whereby it is produced. Transplanted into Syndicalist theory, *sabotage* has been adapted to take its place as a form of class war, an episode in the struggle of Labour against Capital, a struggle in which no means of fighting the enemy may be neglected. It ceases to be a method of returning to employers the exact value of their expenditure in wages, and becomes rather another means of injuring Capital in the ceaseless industrial war. Hence it loses its original meaning of bad pay, bad work, and comprehends any process whereby labourers, whether still at work, or in the act of striking, can do damage to the material possessions of their employers.

Viewed thus comprehensively, the process of *sabotage* permits of indefinite multiplication. Interesting examples are given in an article published some years ago in the organ of the *Bourse du travail* of Montpellier, an organisation of revolutionary tendencies.[1] Therein one may learn how a pennyworth of powder, or even a handful of sand, will put a costly machine out of order; how a joiner or cabinet-maker can, unknown to his employer, damage a piece of furniture and cause him to lose his customers; how a tailor can easily spoil a suit of clothes; how a linen-draper by changing the price-cards, can sell costly goods at a low figure; how a haberdasher's clerk can ruin merchandise by spilling a few drops of corrosive acid during the process of wrapping, laying the blame therefor

[1] Pouget, *Le Sabotage*, p. 34.

on the accidents of delivery; how the agricultural labourer can sow bad grain and use his pick maladroitly, etc., etc. Obviously such methods may at times be as effective as strikes, and far less expensive to the labourers. The experience of deterioration of goods and damage to machines, which can be stopped only by granting the demands of the workers, or by the well-nigh impossible method of discharging the offenders, has at times led employers to yield in matters, which, without *sabotage*, only a strike, an uncertain means, could have brought vividly to their notice. It was, for example, by the use of wholesale and destructive *sabotage* that the journeymen barbers of Paris were enabled to obtain from the masters fair hours and one rest-day a week. The process of shampooing was extended from the heads of customers to the fronts of their employers' shops, which were spattered with a caustic preparation which ate out the paint and completely ruined their appearance. It is said that during the period when the agitation was being carried on, as many as 2,000 of the 2,300 barber shops in Paris were subjected to this treatment at least once—in many cases several times—causing a total loss of some 200,000 francs.[1] Ultimately the employers gave in, and since May 1, 1906, the barbers have had a weekly holiday, and have ceased work at eight o'clock instead of continuing indefinitely into the evening.[2] But it is not only the employer who falls under the ban; customers, too, may experience the inconveniences of *sabotage*, lest they should consciously or unconsciously lend themselves to the exploitation of workmen. By publicly proclaiming that they intended to cut or burn any shoes brought for repair on Sundays, shoemakers made use of *sabotage* or the threat thereof to impress upon their customers that a weekly-rest day is as important for them as for any other class of labour, and demonstrated that even in-

[1] Pouget, *Le Sabotage*, p. 36.
[2] Pouget, *La Confédération Générale du Travail*, p. 46.

dependent workers might find it necessary, on occasions, to use this peculiar Syndicalist method.[1]

Though *sabotage* is primarily practised to procure reforms or to prevent abuses at times when strikes are inconvenient, there are also occasions when it is used rather to supplement strikes than to replace them. Wage-earners have long ago perceived that simple refusal to work is not sufficient to secure the demands of the strikers, but that it is also advisable, in fact indispensable, that the employer be prevented from continuing in any manner the process of production. If employers succeed in importing black-legs or strike-breakers into the factory, they are able thereby to avert the very evils which the strikers hoped to bring upon them, and on which they counted to win their demands, and thus it is inevitable that the strike will end in disaster for those who have undertaken it. Moreover, the usual method by which strikers endeavour to prevent the continuance of production, intimidation or violence upon those hired to take their places at the machines, only too often results in failure; partly because such intimidation is not unfrequently limited to a helpless sort of moral pressure, partly because the authorities, fearful lest more material violence should be attempted, and considering themselves bound to protect those who choose to exercise their undoubted right to work, have a habit of using police and military force to prevent breaches of the peace, thus rendering the strikers powerless. *Sabotage*, on the other hand, covering as it does any act of damage to the interests of employers, offers a more convenient method. Instead of attempting the well-nigh impossible task of restraining from work all those who wish to work, let strikers eliminate the very source of evil by rendering the machinery itself incapable of action. The instruments of production must be made to join the strike of the producers. Then, and then only, will every effort of the employers to escape the effects of the strike end in failure. For neither

[1] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 55, December, 1901.

black-legs nor soldiers nor police will be of any avail. If there are workers, who, through weakness or treachery, are willing to play the game of Capitalism, they are rendered powerless. They must join the strikers. Retreat has been made impossible by the cutting of the bridges. Nor is the practice difficult. For there is scarcely an industry which does not depend on machinery whose delicate functions can be easily disordered.[1]

But, it will be objected, this is mere vandalism, this is the most wanton destruction of the property of others. Not so, cries the Syndicalist. Not mere aimless damage, this. "Imperious necessity" makes such action unavoidable. Never must it be forgotten that it is a question here of life and death. Far from being a mere dispute over wages or hours, every strike is an incident in the class war. And in the class war, as in any war, one side cannot be accused of committing vandalism or wanton destruction, when it renders useless such property of the other as may make its own victory less certain. Nor can damage to machinery in times of strike be considered any more reprehensible than the destruction of a hostile stronghold in times of war. Like every other warlike tactic, the justification of *sabotage* of this sort, and in fact of any sort, lies "in the necessity of the movement and in the aim pursued."[2]

3. Anti-Militarism

An aspect of Revolutionary Syndicalism which is, perhaps, of a secondary nature, but which has, at the same time, an intimate connexion with the practice of strikes, local and general, is the campaign of anti-militarism.

In strike movements carried on by large bodies of workers, and affecting the interests of employers possessing valuable property, the employment of troops to prevent damage or breaches of the peace is of the most frequent

[1] Pouget, *Le Sabotage*, pp. 45–51. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 49.

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occurrence. It is felt in official quarters that strikers, inflamed by feelings of injustice, and liable to be carried away by mob passion, find it peculiarly difficult to restrain themselves within the narrow limits prescribed by the law; and governments have as a rule undertaken the duty of keeping the ring, that is, of protecting spectators and non-combatants from harm, guarding property from damage and holding the parties concerned to the rules of the fight. If there are workers who have no desire to strike, it is considered the duty of the State to protect them from injurious assault. If strikers, anxious to prevent resumption of production, attempt to indulge in *sabotage* upon machinery or buildings, the army is called out to give adequate protection to private property. For if private property is not defended in strikes as well as at any other time, the doors are opened to the onrush of anarchy in general. If the interests of the consumer are in danger, as in the case of the strike of Paris electricians in 1907, not only have "blacklegs" been protected, but soldiers have been requisitioned to carry on the industry, which the strikers would have brought to a standstill. This is a question of public utility. If strikers cannot obtain their demands except by causing the most grievous inconvenience, in some cases actual distress, to thousands utterly unconnected with the dispute, Labour must seek some more fitting method.

To Syndicalists, on the other hand, this State interference in the course of strikes takes on an entirely different aspect. To them it is an illuminating fact that the use of troops is always to the advantage of Capital, never to the advantage of Labour. What is the protection of blacklegs but a robbing of the strikers of their only means of victory? What is the protection of property but the protection of that which is no just possession, but something wrung from the exploitation of the strikers, stolen from the product of their own bitter labour? Where is the gain for the strikers when at the first sign of protest, the first hint of disapproval, the leaders of the

army seem but too willing to issue orders to fire? And in the only too frequent clashes between troops and strikers, what chance has an unarmed mob of labourers before their disciplined opponents?

If one but faces the facts, it seems impossible to argue that the State has acted the part of a benevolent neutral, anxious to be just to both parties, determined to keep on an equality the chances of the fight. It has not been neutral. On the contrary, the very menace of strikes has served to call forth its troops to repress the wage-earners. And yet, what else is to be expected? After all, considering that the State is a bourgeois institution, a class institution, with all its powers at the beck and call of Capital; considering that the army itself is but a bourgeois institution, created with no other purpose than to uphold Capitalism in all its forms, and conscription a bourgeois invention devilishly devised to find protection for Capital among the very sons and brothers of the labourers; it is not at all strange that the State regards strikes with the eye of prejudice and interferes only to reinforce the strength of the employers.[1] Unless they can find some way of evading the evil, workers indulging in strikes, particularly in the general strikes so much more common to-day than ten or fifteen years ago, must expect to find the army, the instrument of Capitalism and of its quintessence, the State, arrayed against them. And as long as the army remains in the hands of the class who at present control it, it will not only defeat minor general strikes of every sort, but will seriously endanger the success of the great general strike which is to revolutionise society.[2]

But is it possible to wrest the army from the hands of Capital? Syndicalists believe that it is, and the anti-militarist movement is the expression of their belief.

It is a notable fact that the task of Syndicalism in this matter is lightened by circumstances which, otherwise

[1] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 141, July, 1903.
[2] *Ibid.*, No. 44, September, 1901.

regarded, have in them much that is offensive. As a result of conscription the rank-and-file of the army is supplied from the working class itself, it is made up of the brothers and sons of those who labour in the fields and in the factories. Every year wage-earners are compelled to see their dear ones dragged off into an institution aimed to support the bourgeoisie. In many a strike, the strikers see ranged against them men of their own class in life, they see those, from whom they might have a right to expect nothing but brotherly sympathy, compelled to repress their attempts to rise, even, at times, to fire upon them.[1] Yet in this very evil lies the hope of success. A mercenary army might remain faithful to those who alone could pay for its services, but an army composed of labourers serving under conscription, is, surely, a dangerous weapon for a capitalist class. Is it too much to hope that the labourer-soldier, if enlightened as to his position, would refuse to defend that class, which, when he has become once more a mere labourer, will hasten to exploit him? Is it too much to hope that he can be taught to refuse to commit, at the order of the bourgeoisie, the crime of firing upon his brother labourers? For fratricide is no less fratricide because it is committed at the order of an army officer; and there is no virtue in obedience to rules which, though defended as the first principles of patriotism, have been set up for the sole interests of a particular class, the bourgeoisie. Let the soldier once realize that his uniform does not abolish his class, and the army will be no longer the efficient instrument of capitalistic despotism.

To further the realisation of these hopes is the aim of the anti-militarist campaign. In the brochure, *Le Manuel du Soldat*, which has been widely circulated despite official repression, and in the columns of *La Voix du Peuple*, especially on those periodical occasions when the lots are drawn for conscripts entering the army, every effort is lavished to impress upon the soldiers that they are still of the labouring classes; that their interests are those

[1] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 77, May, 1902.

of the labouring classes; that the army discipline is a tyranny arbitrarily imposed for the benefit of the bourgeoisie, and an insult to the soldiers themselves; above all, that no circumstances can justify them in supporting the enemies of Labour in time of strikes, and that disobedience to the orders of superiors when the interest of Labour are at stake, is no crime but a solemn duty. Supplementing this propaganda is the work of the *Bourses du travail*, which do all that is possible to prevent the soldiers from being isolated "in the unhealthy atmosphere of the barracks," and by the inducement of libraries and reading-rooms, and particularly of congenial company, tend to draw them into surroundings where they can develop both their "consciousness" of class, and their sentiments of revolt against the tyranny by which they are bound down.[1]

To brand such agitation as dishonourable, disloyal and unpatriotic, is completely to misunderstand the Syndicalist standpoint. To those who regard the State as the Syndicalists regard it, that is, as the supreme expression of Capitalism, all talk of the duties of patriotism is absolutely meaningless. Grant that labourers have the right to fight the battle against Capitalism, and it follows "as the night the day" that they have the right to war against every aspect of Capitalism, including the State, and that they are justified in using every effort to deprive Capitalism of the weapons at its disposal, including the chief weapon of all, the army. If it is urged that surely labourers, as well as any others, have some sentiment of the fatherland, Syndicalists will reply that labourers have no fatherland, no *patrie*, save the place where they are able to find work.[2] *La patrie* is an invention of the bourgeoisie, whereby with high-sounding phrases the working classes can be deluded into sacrificing themselves for the defence of a land of which they possess not an acre, and in the interests of a class who grow wealthy from their exploitation. And

[1] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 78, May, 1902.
[2] Griffuelhes, *L'Action Syndicaliste*, p. 42.

what is the army, in which blind obedience is upheld as the height of virtue and demanded on pain of harshest punishment, but a convenient means for the advancement of the interests of Capital both at home and abroad, whereby at home the demands of the wage-earners can be rejected, whereby abroad privileges and concessions can be won for the exploitation of other lands, other countries? If the State were anything more than the political expression of Capitalism in industry, if wars were carried on for any higher motives than the advance of the bourgeoisie, if they brought any advantage to the wage-earning class, Syndicalists might be able to discover some meaning in loyalty and patriotism as applied to labourers. But when the army and the State, however much bourgeois writers may attempt to disguise the fact, are but instruments in the hands of Labour's enemy, such words are but the empty phrases of those who have an interest in the existing industrial order.[1]

It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that the anti-militarist movement is inspired by a hatred of war as such. The Syndicalists are no "humanitarians," no "pacificists," they would not range themselves with those who seek the promotion of international peace and the brotherhood of man. To them war is the symbol of life, peace the sign of stagnation, of atrophy, of death.[2] If it were possible to suppress all war, society would fall into rapid decay, and it is just because they preserve, in an order threatened with the decadence of social peace, the invigorating violence of class war, that Syndicalists lay claim to the gratitude of the world at large. No, their opposition to war is based on no hatred of that which, to many, seems but a survival of barbarism. It is because they feel that wars are invariably capitalistic wars, from which the bourgeoisie gains every advantage, and for which the labouring classes, in blood and taxes, pay the

[1] Griffuelhes, *L'Action Syndicaliste*, Part III. *Le Patriotisme*, pp. 37–42.

[2] Berth, *Les Nouveaux Aspects du Socialisme*, p. 51.

price. And if they have directed a dangerous campaign against the army, it is not because they see in it a relic of a mediaevalism, from which modern civilisation ought to be free, but simply because it is a capitalistic instrument to perpetuate the slavery of the wage-system. Were the army fundamentally to change its nature, anti-militarism, as practised by Syndicalists, might lose all point; but under the existing circumstances, it finds its justification, like *sabotage*, in the necessities of the times. As one writer puts it, "if all Syndicalist action ends in the strike, and if the strike is repressed by the army, it is illogical to carry on the Syndicalist propaganda without also carrying on the propaganda of anti-militarism." [1]

4. External Pressure

One form of direct action remains to be described. It is what Pouget calls *la pression extérieure*, external pressure, and is practised not so much against employers as against the Government. Despite their refusal to participate in parliamentary activity, Syndicalists are quite willing to recognise that Parliaments have, even for Labour, some little value, that, through legislation and the coercion they can apply to make it effective, they have it in their power to render pleasant or unpleasant, easy or burdensome, the position of the wage-earners. Parliament may not be an assembly which can be used for the overthrow of the industrial system; but as long as the system remains, it is folly not to recognise the possibilities for good or evil of a representative house.[2] For the lot of Labour can be ameliorated by legislation, and, what is more, in many cases *only* by legislation. However much the situation of Labour may be improved by Syndicalist pressure on employers, it seems to remain true that many reforms affecting the labouring class in general, such as workmen's compensation, old age pensions, minimum wage, and the like, can be realised only in the

[1] G. Yvetot, in *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 113, January, 1903.
[2] Pouget, *La Confédération Générale du Travail*, p. 47.

form of laws.[1] At the same time, while such reforms can be obtained from Parliaments, Syndicalists by no means consider that the election of Labour deputies is the way to obtain them. Participation in politics involves too many dangers, so many as to make it an impossible method. There is another means, fortunately, a means whereby the demands of Labour can be more vividly presented, and their satisfaction more speedily secured. It is the method of external pressure.

If a reform is demanded, a vigorous campaign of demonstrations must be carried on. Pamphlets and literature of every sort, elucidating the project and the need for reform, must be scattered broadcast. Meetings, processions, and other public demonstrations of solidarity, must announce to the public that the wage-earners are in earnest, with power to enforce their demands. And surely a Parliament is more likely to be impressed by the appearance of a whole labouring class in action, than by the empty oratory of representatives, whose class consciousness begins to dissolve from the moment they have entered the precincts of the Chamber. The very violence and revolutionary vigour of the manifestations (and the presence of violence and revolutionary vigour is assumed as a matter of course) cannot fail to impress upon the deputies the necessity of reform.

As an example of what may be accomplished by such methods, Syndicalists are fond of citing the agitation of 1903 for the suppression of private employment bureaux. For years these agencies had provoked the bitterest opposition of the labouring classes, regarded, as they were, as institutions for the exploitation of the unfortunate and the needy. But every attempt to procure their abolition by legislative enactment had met with failure. Several times had the Chamber of Deputies elaborated projects of reform, only to have them one and all rejected by the Senate. Deciding finally to take the matter into its own hands, the Confederal Committee of the C.G.T. began in

[1] Griffuelhes *et* Niel, *Les Objectifs de nos luttes de classe*, p. 50.

1903 a regular campaign of agitation. Tons of literature were published; meetings were held in all parts of the country to enliven the labourers and educate public opinion; and finally in December the manifestation reached its climax in the simultaneous meeting of some 100 assemblies, demonstrative of the solidarity of Labour. The result was, apparently, success. Evidently realising as it never had done before, not only the extent of the evil but the intensity of feeling on the matter among wage-earners, the Senate was constrained to yield, and consented to a law authorising municipalities to suppress the private agencies. Thus by a few months of direct pressure was brought about what twenty years of petitions and complaints and attempts at legislation had utterly failed to accomplish. To Syndicalists it seemed a signal proof of the value of their observations upon method.[1]

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Such are the various forms of direct action by which Syndicalism attempts to solve the problem of reconciling revolutionary theory to the humble practice of every day. Revolutionists first and foremost, ardent exponents of the class war as the only hope for the future of the workers, Syndicalists reject parliamentary activity as leading to all the evils of social peace, and limit their practice to the purely economic activities of organised labour-strikes, *sabotage*, external pressure. Through them the social revolution is gradually accomplished, through them it becomes practically identical with the daily opposition of Labour to Capital. Strikes, anti-militarism, *sabotage*, external pressure, constitute an increasing mass of revolutionary activity, which, while grinding down the privileges of the bourgeoisie, unites the labouring classes in opposition to a common enemy, and stimulates them to a degree of organisation, vigour and enthusiasm, which will enable them ultimately to replace the capitalistic system and usher in a new industrial era. If this be true, if Syndicalists have discovered the long-desired remedy for the

[1] Kritsky, *L'Évolution du Syndicalisme*, p. 330 *et seq.*

miseries of the labouring classes, they have, by this alone, established a claim upon the support of all those who desire justice in the world of industry. But there is something even beyond this. It is not only on purely material considerations of the improvement in the lot of Labour that Syndicalists found their claim. Syndicalism is more than the solution of the Labour problem, it is "an essential agent in the civilisation of the world."[1] To sum up what has been said elsewhere, Syndicalists like Sorel believe that society is on the verge of decadence, and a relapse into barbarism; that the tendency of modern thinking is too much towards the worship of solidarity and social peace; that Capitalism turned philanthropic loses the vigour and boldness which selfishness engenders, and only too easily, in the enervating atmosphere of class collaboration, falls into a nerveless, slumbrous state, which lacks both initiative and enthusiasm, and is the unfailing symptom of decline. Only the recall of Capital into the road of intense production and technical perfection can save modern society from falling into the abyss, and only Revolutionary Syndicalism can accomplish the recall. For a revolutionary proletariat, fortified in its own institutions, devoted to a ceaseless class war, is the goad, the stimulus, which alone can urge Capital to its highest achievement. And if Capital is urged to its highest achievement, there is injected into society the warlike vigour which is its salvation, and there is produced that "historic perfection," that juxtaposition of a supremely efficient Capitalism and a fully organised, revolutionary labouring class, which, according to the Syndicalist interpretation of Marx, is the prelude to the Social Revolution.

[1] Lagardelle, *Syndicalisme et Socialisme*, pp. 52 53.

CHAPTER V

THE SYNDICALIST STATE

It is a reproach only too frequently pertinent to the schemes of social reformers that, whatever the force of their destructive abilities, they seem able to develop little or no programme of reconstruction. What do you propose to put in its place ?, is a question which must be answered by all critics of the present order who hope to receive the support of thinkers and of men of action. If Revolutionary Syndicalism is but a method, however efficient, for the destruction of existing political and economic institutions, it will result not only in ills and disappointments for the labouring classes who build their hopes upon it, but in a social crisis which might seriously endanger modern civilisation. The overthrow of capitalistic production and private property by an irresponsible proletariat, offering no alternative order whereby the social life in all its aspects might be efficiently conserved, would be a catastrophe beyond any that the world has yet known, an unhinging of the machinery of society which might plunge the world into barbarism.

To all this, Syndicalist philosophers have given their assent. Far from paying exclusive attention to the work of destruction they have constantly and consistently declared that perhaps the most important part of Syndicalism lies in the evolution of institutions to supplant the institutions of Capital, in preparing the working-classes for the task of carrying on in a new order the economic and productive functions of the old. In a little book, *L'Avenir Socialiste des Syndicats*, written in 1897,

a book which more than any other has been responsible for the growth in the last decade of the constructive side of Syndicalism, Georges Sorel utters the most emphatic warnings to the workers lest they should be tempted to regard their unions as mere organs of resistance, forgetting the work of preparation and education to which they must devote themselves, if the class war is not to end in a general *débâcle*. If evolution be not a false guide, every new form of society must gradually be developed from the material conditions of the old, and the revolution, when it takes place, will consist not in the sudden appearance of some hitherto non-existent set of institutions, but rather in the consummation and formal recognition of a system slowly evolved in the very bosom of that which has been replaced.[1] And in this development conscious effort and social evolution work hand in hand. The growth of Capitalism à la Marx, may automatically force the proletariat to organise, and thus create the institutions which will ultimately be the basis of the new industrialism, but this affords no justification for an attitude of fatalistic non-interference. The process must be supplemented, and its completion hastened, by active effort on the part of the proletariat itself to make its organisations fit receptacles for the responsibility which will one day fall upon them.

For it is the syndicats which, when Capitalism has fallen, must undertake to carry on the work of production. If the labouring classes succeed in the great general strike which is to end the class war, they must be prepared, taking their stand in their own organisations, to carry on the functions wrested from their enemy. This, from a socialistic standpoint, is the very *raison d'être* of the comprehensive organisation which the wage-earners of France have built up. The supreme value of Syndicats, *Bourses du travail*, Federations and Confederation, lies in the essential fact that they offer at once a natural means for the overthrow of Capitalism, and a basis for the in-

[1] *L'Avenir Socialiste des Syndicats*, 2nd Ed., p. 3.

dustrial system which will follow. And it is just because the industrial system which these organisations will introduce is, by nature, diametrically opposed to Capitalism in all its forms, that they must be kept free from all governmental interference or control, that they must shun all collaboration with Capital, and continue to develop on their own lines, independently, relying for their support and for their working on wage-earners alone. As Sorel remarks, " the whole future of Socialism lies in the *autonomous* development of the labour Syndicats."[1]

From a material standpoint this process consists in the gradual transformation by which the powers to-day in the hands of Capitalism and the State, will be acquired by the syndicats. The direct action, whereby class war is prosecuted, results not only in the grinding down of Capital, but in the proportionate uplift of Labour. Every reform which can be won, every function which can be acquired, forms a contribution to the development of the organisations of Labour. If the *Bourses du travail,* for example, can wrest employment agencies from the hands of private companies, they increase by so much their capability of becoming the basis of future society. If workers can carry on the duties of factory-inspection which to-day are fulfilled by the agents of the State, they help to create a law in the factory which is not a capitalistic but a syndicalistic law, the beginning of new juridical relations which will be extended and universalised in the coming industrial era.[2] Thus the obtaining of material reforms, above all the acquisition of functions and powers, become something more than triumphs of Labour over Capital, something higher than ameliorations of the physical conditions of wage-earners ; they constitute part of the work of preparation for the Syndicalist State. And if the class war as carried on in direct action makes the daily revolution possible, the revolution itself consists in this gradual extension and elaboration of the powers of Labour, till at last, without any catastrophe, without

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 59. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 50

any breach in the social order, the old industrial system will give place to the new.

But the work of preparation is not limited to the hastening of this material progress. The success of future production must be ensured by the ceaseless education of the workers. Their technical efficiency and their productive vigour must be stimulated by careful and suitable instruction. The moral qualities, which are to give to future society that ethical perfection from which the present has so sadly fallen, must not be neglected, but capacity for production is of all qualities that which is most essential. Never let it be forgotten that the supreme test of any economic system lies in the efficiency with which it supplies the needs of society. That society has solved its chiefest problem, which has solved the problem of efficient production. For if production be developed to its highest efficiency, the problems of distribution and exchange, with which too many economists have been puzzled, are solved of themselves. Marx was gloriously right in making his master-work an analysis not of capitalistic distribution, but of capitalistic production; and Syndicalists do not hesitate to bestow upon him the "honour of having founded all sociological investigations on considerations of production."[1] Production being so fundamentally important, the problem of education, from a Syndicalist point of view, becomes, primarily, a problem of fitting the producers to produce. The education which renders men capable of performing their functions in factory and workshop is the truly socialistic education.[2]

But this is a form of instruction peculiarly hard to obtain in the present State. Is there any more striking absurdity in modern society than that among a people of producers the greater part of education is purely theoretical, mere abstract speculation and ideology? For, far from being of any advantage to the wage-earner, such an

[1] Sorel, *Introduction à l'Économie Moderne*, p. 125.
[2] Sorel, *L'Avenir Socialiste des Syndicats*, p. 86.

education invariably breeds the pernicious notion that manual labour somehow involves a derogation from dignity, and tends to produce a class of men "whose timidity and diffidence in practice is only equalled by their boldness in abstract speculation."[1] From the very nature of the case, the "ideology" common in the schools is likely to be of little benefit to workers. State education is as dogmatic as Church education. It is a bourgeois education, fitted to do its part in upholding the existing order; an education, in which freedom of thought is not only undesirable, but impossible. For the only doctrines likely to be agreeable to a class determined to overthrow the State and all its accompaniments, are precisely those, the teaching or advocacy of which it is peculiarly to the interest of the State to suppress. It is, in fact, as idle to expect a proletarian education from the schools of a capitalistic State, as to attempt to accomplish the social revolution through the machinery of its legislative assemblies.

Only through schools of their own, established on the lines already laid down by the *Bourses du travail*, can the labourers obtain the instruction they desire. Then, and only then, would be made possible that ideal education of Proudhon's, which consists "in combining instruction with apprenticeship, that is, in founding the school upon life, so as to bring the mind at an early age in touch with reality, to give as soon as possible the sense of responsibility and initiative."[2] Only thus will labour be freed from the stigma with which too often it is branded. No longer regarded with disdain, labour becomes a thing of which a man can be proud. It confers a dignity which the dreams and speculations of the intellectuals can never confer. If affords a satisfaction unknown to those who, from the lofty region of abstractions, consider it beneath the notice of the enlightened. It yields an amount of positive pleasure, which too many, even of Socialists, are

[1] E. Berth, *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, May 1, 1905, p. 30.
[2] E. Berth, *La Revue Socialiste*, November, 1902.

apt to disregard. For there have been Socialists, and those not few, who, deluded by the contemplation of the miseries of the present industrial system, have come to regard labour, not as degrading, but rather as painful, something necessary to a community, but from which no satisfaction is to be obtained except in the ending of it. And these, in their pictures of future society, have set forth the supposedly alluring prospect of a productive system so efficient that a few hours of labour per day will suffice for the ample satisfaction of all material needs, apparently hoping that labourers, in view of the leisure which they will have at their disposal, will be willing for this short time to submit to work and administrative discipline, to sink their individuality and become mere machines.

All this Syndicalists reject with contempt. 'Were such a "do-nothing science" put into practice, the dignity and virtue of labour, together with the individuality and character of the labourer, would perish in the grinding mechanism of administration.[1] If production is the corner stone of the social system, surely it is an evil thing that the producer should come to regard his labour as a necessary but disagreeable task. No! the labourer must learn to love his work. Far from being bound down to it, he must be bound up in it. Is this too much to expect? When the workshop has ceased to be a barracks, and has become the home of free and equal producers, may one not hope that the worker will find there the centre of his existence, and that, with all his energies quickened and every faculty brought into play, he will cease to regard his work as painful, and will rejoice in the exercise of his chosen craft? And if it be objected that the advent of modern machinery has irretrievably reduced labour to a mere routine incapable of evoking any sentiments except repulsion, or at the least indifference, Syndicalists might reply in the words of Sorel,

[1] Berth, *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, May 1, 1905, p. 30.

"To-day we know that a machine demands a superior workman, capable of work of fine quality, able to follow very rapid and very delicate movements, to which he must give more attention than strength. The labourer may still be called an arm, since he possesses only his labour force, but the arm is moved by a will singularly tenacious, awake and far-seeing. The worker wants to do well, because he loves his work." [1]

And a love of labour, coupled with technical efficiency, would be a guarantee for the success of Syndicalism in practice.

That there is something higher than technical proficiency, something more essential even than a love of labour, namely an exalted moral system, Syndicalists are very ready to recognise. Unlike too many Socialists they do not err in neglecting moral considerations. That the so-called "morals" of the bourgeoisie, nourished as they are on the exploitation and commercialism which permeate the economic and political system, should disappear with the Capitalism with which they are associated, is, to Syndicalists, taken for granted. On the other hand, should the social revolution result in the imperilling of true morality, should the success of the proletariat be achieved by the permanent sacrifice of all moral standards, it would, as Syndicalists well know, be an evil, nay, a criminal thing. If the workers have not acquired a superior degree of moral culture, if they have not developed a morality which can supply what is only too lacking in capitalistic society, they will never realise the economic transformation for which they are striving.[2]

Fortunately, not to say providentially, the syndicats themselves are fully capable of evolving the highest moral sentiments. In them, surrounded by the atmosphere of liberty which pervades all the organisations of labour, the workers develop a love of freedom and a hatred of slavery, which gives the brightest promise for future society. Through them the wage-earner escapes the pit-

[1] *La Science Sociale*, September, 1899, pp. 188–9.
[2] Sorel, *L'Avenir Socialiste des Syndicats*, pp. 52–55

falls of isolation and selfishness, and in altruistic devotion to his comrades, frequently in weighty sacrifices for the common good, acquires the sentiment of solidarity indispensable to healthy social life.[1] The very class war which these organisations unceasingly wage, serves to engender virtues which our civilisation seems in danger of losing. In the constant struggle against Capitalism, the labouring classes, roused from passiveness to warlike vigour, acquire in the school of experience a boldness, a spirit of initiative and responsibility, which will ultimately enable them to carry on the work of production free from all external direction.[2] To the Syndicalist, in short, there seems little danger lest the workers should fail in those moral qualities of courage, comradeship, and initiative, which are so necessary to success. For their very organisation guarantees them. That this is true, even now experience goes to prove. It has, for example, been universally conceded that the English Trade Unions, whatever their mistakes as to tactics, are excellent schools for the labouring classes, that they have virtually transformed their moral qualities, that they have won even from employers (many of whom are glad enough to procure guaranteed labour by hiring union men) the recognition of their status as responsible, capable and honourable organisations.[3] Let the labour unions of France, imperfect now, be carried to the highest degree of perfection, and they will become the most notable educative institutions the world has ever known.[4]

Such must be the material, intellectual and moral progress of the labour organisations. If the proletariat can thus bring to perfection "institutions which have no counterpart in the history of the bourgeoisie," based on the "morals of liberty the bourgeoisie no longer knows," it will have erected "a new constitution for society and

[1] Griffuelhes *et* Niel, *Les objectifs de nos luttes de classe*, pp. 61–62.
[2] Berth, *Les Nouveaux Aspects du Socialisme*, p. 38.
[3] Sorel, *L'Avenir Socialiste des Syndicats*, pp. 32–37.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

brought into the world a yet unknown type of civilisation."[1]

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Revolutionary Syndicalism being primarily a philosophy of action, the ingenuity of its exponents has been largely directed to the development of the theory and method of class war, as exemplified in the activities of the labouring classes. Hence, though they have indicated clearly and emphatically enough that the new order will be based on the syndicats, and that the work of preparation must be constant and thorough, Syndicalists have bestowed but little thought upon the elaboration of the details of future society; a neglect quite in accordance with their contempt for idle prophecies, for the spinning of dreams, for all that savours of Utopia. Leaders in a reaction against a Socialism grown somewhat too idealist, proud of a movement depending on action rather than on speculation, they laugh at the "prophetic mania" of the Socialist parties, and profess their willingness to leave to the "childish optimism" of others the task of elaborating "detailed plans and minute descriptions" of the new industrialism.[2]

At the same time, some of the more practical of Syndicalist writers, notably M. Émile Pouget and other contributors to *La Voix du Peuple*, have not, apparently, been able to resist their prophetic impulses; and as there seems to be a general agreement as to the chief aspects of the Syndicalist State, some description of their proposals might not be out of place.

The economic functions of society will be carried on by the organisations which the labouring classes are gradually developing. Of these functions, production, as has been remarked, is by far the most important, involving indeed the success or failure of the entire Syndicalist system. The syndicats, and the various larger bodies in which they are gathered together, have not only to

[1] Sorel, *Réflexions sur la Violence*, pp. 104–105.
[2] Lagardelle, *Syndicalisme et Socialisme*, p. 51.

continue the productive activities to which they have been accustomed, they must also assume the work of direction formerly in the hands of the bourgeoisie. They must become autonomous, free, and self-directing associations of producers, and upon their performance in this new and independent rôle hangs the fate of Syndicalism. Technically speaking, and from the standpoint of organisation, the problem is easy. The proletariat has but to follow in the footsteps of Capitalism. For the mechanical perfection, the concentrated and efficient organisation of modern industrialism, are rather legacies of Capitalism to the wage-earners than peculiar features of Capitalism, to disappear with it. The proletariat is the legitimate child of Capitalism, its heir-presumptive, whose interest it is, not to abjure the achievements of its parent, but to render its inheritance as generous as may be; whose future task will be facilitated, not by hindering the progress of production, but by encouraging in every way the development of its technical capacity.[1] As Sorel remarks, "it is of the greatest importance to emphasise the character of high prosperity which industry must possess, to permit the realisation of Socialism."[2] The very selfishness of Capital will thus produce conditions eminently favourable to Labour, and it is in the recognition of this fact that Syndicalists like Sorel have not only urged Capital to increasing unrelenting advance, but have become as enthusiastic in the praises of its productive achievements as were Marx and Engels in the well-known passage of the *Communist Manifesto*.[3]

While technical processes will remain the same, powers of direction and control will pass to the syndicats themselves. The workmen, organised among themselves as they are to-day, only more comprehensively, will take over the direction of factories and workshops, and all other forms of industry. They will elect their own

[1] Berth, *Les nouveaux aspects du Socialisme*, p. 21.
[2] *Réflexions sur la Violence*, p. 184.
[3] Cf. also Berth, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

directors, control their own output, apportion their own rewards. Thus will each syndicat become a sort of co-operative producer's association, carrying on either in one or in several establishments every local industry. On the other hand, industries, which from the extent of their operations exceed the capabilities of the individual syndicats, would, of necessity, and as a matter of course, fall to the care of the departmental, regional or national Federations, as the case might require. It is felt that the organisation of the labouring classes has a comprehensiveness which enables them to cope with every form of industry, from the humblest establishments with their handfuls of workmen, to the great large-scale concerns which dominate modern industrial society. A railway could be handled by the National Syndicat of Railway-workers. The Federation of Miners could carry on the exploitation of mines with equal efficiency, and with greater zeal, than any private company.[1]

One of the most boasted advantages of any socialistic State is the absence of competition. The cranky machinery of present-day industrialism, with its mad scramble of competition, accomplishing the work of harmonising supply and demand with an inefficiency that produces alternate expansion and depression of trade, and heightens the misery of the masses by fugitive gleams of prosperity, it is the ambition of every Socialist to abolish. But while State Socialists, basing their solution on the model of the existing political order, aim to unify production by absorbing all industry into one great industry carried on by the State, Syndicalists, enemies of every form of centralisation, in which they see one of the greatest evils of bourgeois society, rest their hopes for the removal of competition on "voluntary contractual agreements between federated labour organisations."[2] In every locality the *Bourses du travail*, their present statistical activities enlarged and perfected, would furnish such indications of the

[1] Pouget, in *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 84, June, 1902.
[2] *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, January, 1903, p. 16.

demand for commodities as to enable production to be regulated with scientific accuracy; and it is assumed that the National Federations of trade and industry would prevent the sporadic over-production which seems inevitably associated with competition, by the equitable division of output among their constituent syndicats.[1] And over all would be the C.G.T., exercising a general supervision, which would ensure, and doubly ensure, harmonious production.

Yet there would be no compulsion. The Federations and the C.G.T. woul dexert a power, but the power, as now, would depend on influence not on command. Thereby will be assured, not the mechanical unity which comes of blind obedience, and which is achieved by the sacrifice of all real vigour, but the inner harmony engendered by common interests and by the development of those sentiments of initiative and individual responsibility which only autonomy can foster. And it is this inner harmony alone which can give healthy life to social organisations.[2]

It cannot be too strongly emphasised that Syndicalists look upon their proposed industrial organisation as liberty put into practice, liberty extending through all its stages, right down to individual factories and workshops. They wish to abolish the discipline, almost military in character, which distinguishes the capitalistic factory. The autocratic will, imposed from without, which produces co-operation, indeed, but only of the most mechanical sort, they hope to see pass into history along with the kindred features of Capitalism. It is not so much that this discipline is bad in itself, but that it has fulfilled its mission in social development.

"The recognition which Syndicalism pays to Capitalism applies not merely to the material riches which the latter has created, but also and above all to the moral and spiritual transformation which it has worked among the labouring

[1] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 84, June, 1902.
[2] Berth, *op. cit.*, pp. 29–31.

masses, who, thanks to its iron discipline, have been drawn from their primitive sloth, and their individualist anarchism, to become capable of more and more perfect collective labour. Syndicalism fully recognises that civilisation began and rightly began in constraint, that this constraint was salutary, beneficent, creative, and that if one may hope for a régime of liberty with the guardianship neither of capitalist nor the State, it is thanks to this very régime of constraint, which has disciplined mankind and rendered it gradually capable of rising to free and voluntary labour." [1]

But the transformation once accomplished, the discipline becomes no longer necessary. Its historic rôle achieved, the genius of the working classes aroused, constraint becomes not only superfluous, but a positive check on further growth. For the discipline imposed from without must be substituted the self-discipline arising from within. The *will* in every factory must be the will of the labourers themselves, a will to which they can submit, yet remaining free and voluntary agents. Only thereby can the system of industry be an organism and not a mechanism as it is to-day. For every expression of authority, imposed by individuals or bodies foreign to the wage-earning class, produces the mechanical features so much to be avoided; and it is precisely because State Socialists fail to recognise this truth, and attempt to substitute for the external will of Capitalism the equally external will of the State, that their solution of the industrial problem can never satisfy the needs and aspirations of the labouring classes.[2]

Thus inheriting from Capitalism mechanical processes developed to their highest perfection, furnished with a technical education worthy of such a birthright, stimulated by a love for work which has become dignified and honourable, with an affection for his workshop which only freedom from constraint and exploitation can develop, his productive vigour and directive powers strengthened by the sense of responsibility and initiative which the

[1] Berth, *op. cit.*, pp. 34–35.
[2] Berth, *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, May 1, 1905, p. 18 *et seq.*

struggle against Capital and the peculiar organisation of Labour have produced, the worker of the Syndicalist State will display an efficiency which will be the surest guarantee for the success of production. And if production is efficient, the future of industrial society, as seen in Syndicalist perspective, takes on the rosiest aspect.

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Revolutionary Syndicalism is not a system of economics. Content with sketching the broad outlines of future production, its exponents have given few if any hints as to the questions of distribution and exchange, questions which have always constituted the focus of most economic disputation. How the product is to be shared among those who contribute to its production, is a problem for which they offer no solution. That the wage-system will disappear they are agreed, but they give no indication of the arrangements which will supersede it. Once more one must recall their deep-rooted objection to all prophecy and idle Utopias. Also it is a common opinion among Syndicalist writers that the problem of distribution is merged in the problem of efficient production. The solution of the one involves the solution of the other. Production in the Syndicalist State, with useless labour abolished, with the wasteful competition of to-day replaced by orderly and harmonious co-operation, carried on by labourers stimulated by their surroundings to the highest endeavour, will be so generous, so exuberant, that at last will be realisable the ideal of the Utopians, "to each according to his needs." [1] As to exchange, it has been suggested that money will disappear (and with it, all cupidity), and that exchanges will take place through the medium of the *Bourses du travail*, which will constitute themselves great magazines for the distribution of the products of industry.[2] But there seems little agreement as to the basis on which ex-

[1] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 92, August, 1902.
[2] *Ibid.*, numbers for August and September, 1902.

changes should be made. In fact such suggestions as have been offered are evidently but echoes from the older school of French Socialists, and are neither to be taken seriously, nor regarded as responsible expressions of Syndicalist theory in the field of economics.

It would be nearer the truth to say that Syndicalism limits its scanty economic teaching to the broad outlines of a productive system. It should be regarded, as its leaders have always insisted, primarily as a method of action whereby the labourers can escape the evils of the wage system. The economic details of the future must be left to the play of circumstances. When the necessity arrives, the details will undoubtedly shape themselves as the occasion demands. Unwilling to commit themselves to definite proposals and definite economic doctrines which can only too easily be attacked, and in the defence of which much energy must be wasted which might be better employed, Syndicalists very wisely limit their prophetic utterances to those vague and ambiguous, though alluring, fancies, which, from their very lack of outline, succeed both in defying all criticism, and in obtaining the acceptance of men of very different temperaments and very different shades of belief. Large and glowing visions of a future society in which the free producer, in love with his work and his fellow-workers, solves by his efficient production all the petty problems of economics, serve the purposes of propaganda far better than the minute elaboration of future industrial details, which has been the mistake of so many Socialists. Consisting in generalities which are not easy to attack, they are none the less capable of evoking the enthusiasm of the labourers. For they satisfy at once the idealism which finds satisfaction in the spinning of Utopias, and the opportunism which, when it is a question of practice, persists in believing that every day must solve its own details.

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The programme of Syndicalism involves not only the substitution of a new for an old industrial system, but

also the substitution of a new for an old political system. The political machinery of the present day, what we call the State, with all its aspects, legislative, judicial, executive, regarded by Syndicalists as the political expression of Capitalism, must disappear with Capitalism itself. To attempt to use the State for the emancipation of Labour, or to give the State an aspect adapted to an industrial system from which the capitalist has disappeared, is hopeless. Even more, it is absurd. How can we conserve the very "quintessence of Capitalism" in a society based on the labouring classes? Were the State not abolished by those who would inaugurate a new system of production, it would be the negation of all the teaching of historic materialism, which postulates a harmony between the economic and political manifestations of society. It is for this reason that State Socialism, endeavouring to emancipate the wage-earners by concentrating all industry in the power of the State, is utterly impossible. The emancipation of Labour and the preservation of the State cannot go hand in hand. They are as opposite as the poles; for the one depends on the destruction, the other on the perpetuation of capitalistic industry. Hence are the Syndicalists absolutely logical, regarding it as they do, in their proposal "not to reform but to destroy the State." [1]

Syndicalism does not endeavour, like State Socialism, "to capture the positions occupied by the bourgeoisie, to don their cast-off garments," it is its aim "to deprive the bourgeois political organisation of all life, and transfer all that it has of utility to a proletarian political organisation, created along with and in proportion to the development of the proletariat itself."[2] But that proletarian political organisation has little in common with the existing State; indeed, when the process of transfer is complete, the State, as it is now known, will have disappeared. As Engels puts it, "the society which will

[1] Sorel, *Réflexions sur la Violence*, p. 151.
[2] Sorel, *L'Avenir Socialiste des Syndicats*, p. 50.

organise production on the basis of an association of free and equal producers, will transport the whole machinery of the State to its fit abode—the museum of antiquities."[1] A new form of political organisation there will undoubtedly be, but it will differ as much from the old as Syndicalism differs from Capitalism. In short it will be a State in the sense of a form of political society, but not the State, *l'État*, which, in all Syndicalist theory, is considered that particular form of political society which corresponds to Capitalism in industry.

To regard Syndicalists as Anarchists, on the other hand, would be a mistake, though a mistake commonly made, and countenanced to some extent by utterances of Syndicalists themselves. Syndicalism before 1900 received its greatest inspiration from an Anarchist, Fernand Pelloutier, secretary of the *Fédération des Bourses du travail*. Moreover, the founding of *La Voix du Peuple* in 1900, and the real beginning of the fame of the C.G.T., were due, largely, to the entrance into that organisation of Anarchists like Émile Pouget, former editor of an Anarchist paper *Père Peinard*, Paul Delesalle, a frequent contributor to the literature of Syndicalism, and others of the same stamp. The impression spread abroad by the prominence of such men in the labour organisations has been still further heightened by the anti-military, anti-parliamentary, anti-State campaign, which for the last decade has formed the most dramatic part, perhaps, of Syndicalist propaganda. It is not unnatural to infer that those who wish to destroy the State (in the ordinary sense of the term) are Anarchists, and the enemies of Syndicalism, particularly among Socialists, have not been slow to identify the one with the other.

The identification is fallacious. Undoubtedly all Anarchists desire the abolition of the State, but it is not true that all who desire the abolition of the State are Anarchists. Perhaps it would be better to say that it depends on what is meant by an Anarchist. For there

[1] Quoted by Sorel, *La Décomposition du Marxisme*, p. 53.

are several distinct varieties. On the one hand, there is the philosophic Anarchist of the type of Stirner, who proposes not only to destroy the existing State, but to remain free, thenceforth, from any form of State, any form of government whatever. Then there is the Anarchist like Proudhon, an essentially social creature, who would abolish the State as we know it, only to set up in its place another, more just, more equitable, with less tyranny and centralisation and coercive machinery in general, but still a State. Finally there is the third type, a variant, in fact, of the first, who so ardently desires the abolition of existing government that he hastens to cause its destruction by the indiscriminative use of violent explosives. Of these three types, the last has nothing to do with Syndicalism. Nobody has accused the Syndicalist of being a revolutionary Anarchist. Of the other two, it is most commonly the first, the intellectual, philosophic Anarchism, with which Syndicalism is apt to be identified.

That this identification is essentially false has been fully demonstrated by M. Edouard Berth in an exceedingly able essay, *Les Nouveaux Aspects du Socialisme*, in which he points out the very considerable difference, nay, the " veritable abyss," which separates the ideal of Anarchism (i.e. philosophic Anarchism) from the ideal of Syndicalism, and shows for what very different reasons Anarchists and Syndicalists advocate the abolition of the State. If Anarchists desire its destruction, it is because they object to a State and to a Government, *as* a State and *as* a Government. It is not hostility to a particular form of government, it is hostility to any form of government. Essentially optimists and ingenuous believers in the native goodness of men, Anarchists are persuaded that the entire structure of modern civilisation, its system of institutions, the family, property, the State, succeed only in depraving mankind, in destroying the virtues with which Nature had endowed it. Liberty is overwhelmed in the iron discipline which civilisation imposes. For

the sake of the scanty happiness which the rule of law can offer, man is compelled constantly to suppress the instincts and passions which make up his real nature. To the philosophic Anarchist the individual is everything, and all that tends to suppress or limit individuality is an evil. He cannot recognise the value of social combinations, or of any form of society, because individuals cannot enter into them without arbitrarily (though mutually) limiting their independence. And it is because he regards the State (or *any* form of government) as a social combination in which individuals are sacrificed on the altar of society, that he desires its abolition. In fact, to the philosophic Anarchist, who believes that men, despite superficial harmony, are by nature isolated and unsocial units, every form of society becomes an absurdity.

Quite opposite is the attitude of the Syndicalist.[1] He agrees with the Anarchist only in his desire to abolish the State. But he opposes the State not because all government is objectionable, but because this particular form of government is suited only to capitalistic society, and is utterly incompatible with the economic society which he proposes to introduce. Far from seeing in association any repression or diminution of individuality, the Syndicalist believes that it increases rather than lessens the powers of individuals; that in solitude there is "impotence, misery, incapacity," in association "power, riches, capacity increased a hundredfold." For Syndicalism is essentially a social philosophy, its method of action a social method. What are the labour organisations but the expression of this social tendency? How can the general strike be carried to success save through the solidarity of the labouring classes, a solidarity socialistic, in the actual sense of the word? In what other way could harmonious production be assured and the future State made realisable, except through the association of the labourers, perpetuated in their unions?

[1] Berth, *Les Nouveaux Aspects du Socialisme*, pp. 35–49.

Between Anarchism and Syndicalism lies the chasm which separates Individualism from Socialism. In fact, the anti-social nature of Anarchism seems to Syndicalists a subtle form of decadence. The denial of the social idea, the refusal on the part of the individual to collaborate in any collective work, are the signs whereby one may recognise a society in the process of decay. The only possible progress for the modern world is in the extension and elaboration of the principle of association; but Anarchism, from the very nature of its ideas, represents a force which must either retard or prevent that progress.

At the same time, though there doubtless exists a veritable abyss between Syndicalists and philosophic Anarchists, there is some justification for the confusion of terms; for Syndicalists in their opposition to the State are, confessedly,[1] disciples of P. J. Proudhon, and Proudhon was pleased to call himself an Anarchist. Yet it must be remembered that Proudhon took care to define what kind of an Anarchist he was, and that no more ardent exponent of association ever lived. His Anarchism, like that of the Syndicalists, was an Anarchism of *groups*, not an Anarchism of individuals. He desired to abolish the existing State, not in order that individuals should enjoy the pleasures of isolation and conduct themselves according to the divine laws of Nature, but rather that groups of individuals, united for productive purposes, might make those voluntary arrangements between themselves, which, based on mutual convenience, are stronger than all the bonds imposed by law and government. He saw in the group rather than in the individual the true reality, he believed that above the individual being stands the collective being, a being which is no mere adding together of isolated individuals, but something *sui generis*, with a character and functions all its own—and more divine.[2] Throughout the entire body of

[1] Berth, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 43-46, quoting from Proudhon's 1*st* "*Lettre sur la Progrès.*"

Proudhon's writings runs this panegyric upon association, stamping him at once not as an Anarchist, but as an ardent Socialist. He desired more freedom in society, he demanded that society should be shaped in a federalistic rather than in a centralised mould, but he was emphatically opposed to any and every system which would destroy society. And certainly the collection of isolated individuals, which would represent Anarchism, is synonymous with the destruction of what is meant by the term society.

The attitude of Proudhon is the attitude of the Syndicalists. In their proposal to destroy the State, they are seeking only to remove a form of political order which has had its use, but which, with the coming change in industry, will become an anachronism, and to set up another political order suited to future production, but equally antagonistic to Capitalism and to Anarchism. They desire to abolish the centralisation which permeates the State as it permeates the factory, and finds expression in Parliaments, Councils, and other political machinery. But they desire to impose upon society a system of federalism, wherein autonomy is respected, and voluntary agreements take the place of the compulsion of the law. They are as far removed from the individualism of the philosophic Anarchists as are the exponents of "things as they are."

Roughly speaking, the absence of centralisation constitutes the essential feature in which, from a political standpoint, the Syndicalist State would be a novelty. For it appears from Syndicalist writings that many of the functions, which to-day are in the hands of State or Municipality, will not be abolished, but will be transferred to the labour organisations on which Syndicalism is founded. Administrative functions of some sort must be carried on, if solidarity is not to be hopelessly shattered.[1] Moreover, while Syndicalists are as little prophetic in political as in economic matters, it seems that the future unit of government, or rather of administration,

[1] Sorel, *L'Avenir Socialiste des Syndicats*, pp. 50–52.

is, as would be expected from their fondness for decentralisation, to be found in the Syndicalist equivalent of the Municipality—the *Bourses du travail.* Uniting the producers in every trade and industry in an organisation where all differences are subordinated to the interests of labour in general, already endowed with functions of administration in connexion with the labouring class, the *Bourses du travail,* when the republic of free producers is attained, will become synonymous with the adult population of each local centre. Even now their duties are numerous. They have acquired practice in administration both by directing employment bureaux and by the collection and publication of economic statistics. Through their libraries and courses of instruction they have become educative centres for the labouring class. Let such functions be extended and perfected, and the *Bourse du travail,* without any revolutionary transformation, ultimately becomes the *Hôtel de Ville.*[1]

Such relations between these local units as might be necessary for the sake of harmony and co-ordination, would be supplied by machinery like the existing Federal Committees of the C.G.T. A central body of the kind, possessing no authoritative or coercive powers, an arrangement for convenience and little more, could involve no irksome restraint. Only thus can be solved the problem of realising Socialism without falling into some insidious form of despotism. The association of men must be furthered if the world is to progress, but it must be achieved by purely voluntary bonds, free from every element of compulsion. If it is to be a living organism and not a mechanism doomed to decay, future society must reconcile the principle of association with the principle of independence. And in the Proudhonian Federalism which they have adopted as the type of their political and economic organisation, Syndicalists believe they will bring about this indispensable reconciliation.

Pouget, *La Voix du Peuple,* No. 84, June, 1902.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FAILURE OF THE GENERAL STRIKE.

In approaching the question of Syndicalist tactics it is to be noted that one is here face to face, not so much with certain interesting speculations, as with a very definite and practical problem. Constructive Syndicalism, as offering a novel field of speculation to social philosophers somewhat jaded with Socialism, has, of course, a peculiar interest of its own; but to the great majority, even of those who find the social question the most absorbing of all questions, a State based on the organisations of the labouring classes seems so vague and remote a possibility, its realisation involves a projecting of the imagination so far into the future, that it could excite little interest and less enthusiasm. Of the tactics and practice of Syndicalism, on the other hand, the case is entirely different. Class war has passed beyond the realm of speculation, it is being realised in practice. Direct action and the general strike have, among a very considerable body of wage-earners, become an accepted method for the redress of grievances and the acquisition of rights. Far beyond the boundaries of France and Italy, where Syndicalism may be said to be at home, among the other industrial nations of the Continent, in England, in America, the revolutionary methods of this new brand of Socialism are enjoying what many would consider a dangerous degree of popularity. If for years the propaganda of Syndicalism found but little support outside the Latin countries of Europe, if it was rejected as revolutionary idealism by the more practical, less vision-

ary labourers of Germany and England, it has succeeded at last in bursting its bounds, and forcing its programme of direct action and the general strike upon organisations as little inclined to it by nature as the English Trade Unions. For the industrial conditions of England seem to-day to favour the spread of Syndicalism. It is a time of great unrest. Never has the antagonism between Capital and Labour been more bitter, never more intense the realisation among labourers that they constitute a class, whose interests, despite all superficial evidence to the contrary, remain under present conditions fundamentally incompatible with those of their employers. It is a time when wage-earners are ready enough to acquiesce in doctrines of class war. It is a time when the younger generation of trade union leaders, ambitious, educated, face to face with conditions of living harsher, comparatively, than for many years, are willing to commit their organisations to the revolutionary policies of Syndicalism; not, it is true, because they hope thereby to achieve the Syndicalist state—for they are no doctrinaire Socialists—but because they see in such methods the sole prospects of improving the present condition of the labouring class. They have come to realise that neither the traditional activities of the trade unions, such as the local strike or the trade agreement, nor the parliamentary efforts of the Labour party, finding expression in legislation, are capable of releasing the labourers from their precarious position. It has been forced most emphatically upon their attention, that in both the political and economic fields, the trade unions have proved themselves incapable of elevating wages in proportion to the rise in the cost of living. And when trade unionists come to the conclusion that the trade unionism, which was for decades their hope and their pride, is no longer able to secure to the labourers a wage which will guarantee them against poverty, the ground is sufficiently prepared for the spread of the peculiar ideas of Syndicalism. If trade unionism, with its tendency to

trade agreements, and its hostility to strikes except as a last resort, has reached the end of its achievements, if Capital has made its last sacrifice to reformist tactics, and still the mass of labourers live in constant dread of the lurking spectre of want, then is the method of social peace stripped of all its glamour, and the method of class war—constant, unrelenting class war—forced upon the workers as their only means of betterment.

Moreover, in England as in France, there has arisen among a considerable number of labourers, particularly among the younger set of unionists, the conviction that the Syndicalist distrust of parliamentary activity is by no means unfounded, and that politics either will never achieve the reforms which Labour demands, or will achieve them only after unnecessary and intolerable delay. Though not necessarily participating in the Syndicalist theory, that the State and its institutions are but the political expression of the industrial system which is called Capitalism, a great many English unionists, from practical experience rather than from speculation, have come to feel that Parliament is fitted rather to register the decrees of Capital than to affirm the demands of Labour; that those who are at home in its atmosphere, and those who have control of its machinery, are the friends, not of the masses, but of wealth and vested interests; that what reforms are wrung from Parliament are at the expense of exertions which might be far more profitably spent elsewhere, the representatives of Labour being compelled, in their alliance with Liberal or other governments, and in return for measures which, themselves, seldom if ever attack the vital problems besetting the wage-earner, to squander their energies and resources in support of a vast deal of legislation of absolutely no value whatever to the labourers as a class. Even with the best intentions Parliament, from the very slowness of its procedure, is a poor instrument for satisfying the economic needs of the masses. The machinery of Parliament is exceedingly slow and cumbersome, clogged as it

is by the forms and procedure and red-tape, which seem the distinguishing signs of a representative chamber. Vexatious in the extreme are the delays incurred in the passage of reforms, the very necessity of which seems to take years to sink into the minds of the legislators. Those who would enforce the demands of Labour, demands which, just because they are concerned with the most vital necessities of life, call for speedy satisfaction, have to overcome a double force of obstruction. On the one hand there is the essentially conservative doctrine, which, in the effort to avoid hasty and ill-considered legislation, elevates delay to the height of a constitutional principle. On the other there is the party system, which leads the Opposition to retard the projects of the Government, sometimes because they regard such proposals as undesirable and harmful in themselves, but quite as frequently, in all probability, because of a native objection to furthering the schemes of their opponents. And so, while the clumsy mechanism grinds on, the labouring classes must wait in patience and with resignation, hoping for better times.

It is no wonder that the unions turn with eagerness to any method offering a more speedy solution of the problems of labour. Given the gloom of the present economic situation, it is not unnatural that even those whose temperament is, under ordinary circumstances, conservative, should forsake, temporarily at least, the plodding policy of reform, to adopt the more brilliant if more doubtful proposals of Syndicalism. To-day direct action, particularly in the form of the general strike, has become a method, though perhaps not an officially recognised method, of trade union policy. It has been put into practice, and though its success has been little, it will be practised again. And it is because Syndicalism is thus beginning to encroach on the traditional policy of English trade unionism—it is because its methods, if not its ideas as to the future economic system are finding acceptance among the wage-earners in England, and in many other

industrial countries—it is because, in short, Syndicalism has become a present issue of very great practical importance, that an examination of the value of its methods, particularly of the general strike—its most characteristic method—is no less than a duty for all those who interest themselves in the solution of the Labour problem.

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Consider first, as far as it is possible to judge the matter, what has been the result of the practice of direct action as expressed in strikes.

The official statistics for the period 1894–1907 are as follows [1]:—

Period.	Percentage of Successes.	Percentage of Failures.	Percentage of Compromises.
1894–1896	24	47	29
1897–1899	22	42	36
1900–1902	22	40	38
1903–1906	24	36	40
1907	21	41	38

From these it would appear to most that the method of the strike has not been to any great extent advantageous to the labourers. Failures have been experienced in an average of 43 per cent. of the total number of strikes, and failures, as Syndicalists themselves know, spread disorganisation and demoralisation among the labour unions. While the proportion of actual successes, never as high as 25 per cent., has remained almost constant for a period of fourteen years.

But Syndicalists, aware of the importance to their theory and practice of this question of the average success or failure of strikes, have spared no efforts to prove to their followers and to the public in general that, as a method of action, strikes have, on the whole, been distinctly favourable to wage-earners. Although it is true that they are regarded less from the standpoint of material gains than as episodes in the class war (which may be acceptable in theory), in practice it is evidently

[1] Webb, *New Dictionary of Statistics*, p. 587.

necessary that material successes be achieved, if the rank and file of the labourers are to be induced to carry them on; for, whatever the revolutionary character of these movements, whatever their educative value in developing solidarity and the capacity for larger movements, a wage-earning class confronted with a record of failures will show little enthusiasm for them. Consequently one finds M. Pouget and M. Griffuelhes, both active and zealous Syndicalists, exercising their ingenuity in extracting from the official statistics every evidence they will yield, to prove that strikes offer solid advantages to those who carry them on. The work is a difficult one, and they have failed to accomplish it successfully. Though they have apparently satisfied themselves with the results of their efforts, it is obvious that these results have been obtained only by a partiality in the interpretation of terms, so glaring that it could deceive only those who are either prejudiced or ignorant. For instance, take the figures quoted above. It is the custom of Syndicalist publicists[1] to consider as strikes terminating favourably to the wage-earners, not only those which have resulted in actual success, but those which have been settled by a compromise (*transaction*), a compromise, as Griffuelhes remarks, "evidently giving advantages to the workers." Thus for the year 1907, instead of 21 per cent. successes and 41 per cent. failures, this method of estimating gives 59 per cent. favourable and 41 per cent. unfavourable to the labourers. But surely such optimism is quite unjustifiable. Many are the compromises to which the workers have agreed, not voluntarily, but because their fighting strength has been exhausted, accepting a diminution of their demands, not with joy that something at least has been gained, but with a sense of defeat almost as bitter as in the event of failure. Nor can a class, to which the slightest difference of wage is of the most vital importance, regard as a favourable issue a compromise

[1] Griffuelhes, *L'Action Syndicaliste*, p. 21, and Pouget, *La Confédération Générale du Travail*, p. 52.

whereby a proposed reduction of 10 per cent. is, as the result of a strike, made but 5 per cent. For it is the actual loss experienced, rather than the saving effected by the strike, which lingers in the minds of the workers.

It might be objected that in any case such statistics prove very little, that in the theory of Syndicalism ordinary strikes play a very minor part, that they are important only in so far as they prepare the workers for larger movements. For these larger movements themselves, known as general strikes, both as a means of enforcing particular demands, and as an education in the practice which is to ensure the success of the social revolution, are the really distinguishing characteristics of Syndicalist action, and only from their success or failure, not from the success or failure of strikes, taken indiscriminately, can be deduced the value of Syndicalism as a method of action. In short, if Syndicalists are to justify their practice, they must justify that part of their practice which distinguishes them from Socialists, which makes them, in fact, Revolutionary Syndicalists, awaiting a social revolution through the medium of the trade unions. And such justification is to be derived from statistics not of strikes in general, but of general strikes. The criticism is pertinent. So much has it become an intimate part of Syndicalist practice, that it is no exaggeration to say that Syndicalism, as a method of action, stands or falls with the general strike. It is the expression *par excellence* of the class war; above all, it is, in its grandest aspect, synonymous with the social revolution. Without it, as Syndicalists view the matter, class war would sink into an insignificant squabble; without it the social revolution would become an absolute impossibility.

What, then, of the general strike? Has it enjoyed a greater measure of success? It is natural to assume that what is true of ordinary strikes is true of general strikes—that as failure has been only too frequent in the case of the former, there is little to be expected from the latter. How can one expect anything great from the practice of

general strikes, when operations of a much less extensive and much less complicated character have proved too much for the powers and organisation of the wage-earners concerned? And yet the case may be different. It may be that, despite the unfavourable evidence of statistics, the workers have, as Syndicalists hope, actually derived from their efforts that spirit of solidarity, that education in the gymnastic of mass movements, which can make the general strike a success. It may be that a preparation has been given to these larger affairs which was lacking in the others, and that, as a result, a degree of success has been attained by general strikes to which minor strikes could naturally not aspire. It may be that, in the realisation of the importance, almost of the solemnity, of general strikes, the wage-earners have reserved for them a spirit of solidarity and an abundance of enthusiasm which less vital acts could never call forth; and which would carry the movement along in one great wave of success. But this is not the case. The record of general strikes, if we take those large movements which during the last ten or twelve years have disturbed the industry of France, is no more encouraging than the other. Far from obtaining success in this field of action, the workers have met with almost uniform failure. The larger the extent of the operations, the more certain defeat seems to be. In those industries whose services to the public are indispensable, in which must take place the dislocation which may be the prelude of revolution, and in which consequently it is of the utmost importance that any act of revolt be carried to a successful conclusion, the labourers have met with the most decisive set-backs. Almost totally futile, from the Syndicalist standpoint, has been every general strike in such important industries as mining and transportation; and the only attempt to involve in a single movement the workers of a large number of industries, the general strike of May 1, 1906, ended, as far as concerned the attainment of the professed aim of the movement, in a complete collapse.

What are the reasons for this outcome, an examination of certain typical strikes may perhaps discover. The details of three movements will be considered: the general strike of miners, 1902, the general strike of May 1, 1906, and the general strike of railway workers in October, 1910. For each of these has a peculiar significance in the practice of Syndicalism; the co-operation of miners and transport-workers being considered indispensable to the success of any strike that pretends to be revolutionary, and the movements of May 1, 1906, having received such a preparation in a propaganda extending over a period of eighteen months, that its success or failure may be held to be a fair example of what may be expected from Syndicalist methods.

The Miners' Strike of 1902.

The Federation of Miners had been for years devoted to the method of political activity, but during the critical period of Millerand's first ministry the revolutionists had become very active, and throughout 1901 and 1902 its 50,000 members were much agitated over the question of the general strike. A local strike at Montceau, a strike over grievances of a purely particularist nature, which might otherwise have been of no importance whatever, served as an opportunity for active revolutionists to urge the declaration of a general sympathetic movement, and a favourable vote was actually secured at the Congress of the Federation in May, 1901. This, however, was evidently little more than a formal affirmation of a general principle, for no effort was made to put the motion into effect, the majority being unwilling to sacrifice their self-interest on the altar of sentiment. As a result, the miners of Montceau were compelled to accept the terms of their employers.[1]

But the question of the general strike was still to be settled. It was urged by the militants that the legislative

[1] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 24, May, 1901.

method, to which the miners had committed themselves, was a tedious one, that the eight-hour day and the minimum wage, which the miners were then demanding from Parliament, were but delusive phantoms, pursued in such fashion, and that these reforms could be achieved more expeditiously and more certainly by the revolutionary unionism of the Syndicalists. It was suggested, moreover, perhaps less from conviction than for purposes of propaganda, that a general strike of miners might have very serious effects, causing such a dislocation of industry as to compel other Federations to join the movement. It might even usher in the social revolution itself.[1]

What followed is a typical example of the difficulty of effecting a general strike. A referendum was held, and under the influence of an epidemic of militantism, 40,000 out of 50,000 votes were cast in favour of a general strike on November 1, 1901, provided the government had not by that date acceded to the demands of the miners. A committee of seven was appointed to take charge of the affair, their deliberations occasioning very considerable anxiety among all the propertied classes. After all, nothing happened that year. November 1 arrived, the government refused to give way, but no strike took place. Despite the referendum, despite the threats heaped on an obdurate government, the committee could come to no definite conclusion. It was rent by division, and the two parties, one for the general strike, the other for parliamentary methods, wasted their energies defending their respective points of view in the public press, finally plunging into an exchange of abusive personalities which caused scandal to everybody, Syndicalists included, and inflicted a serious check on the movement.[2] In the end it was decided to refer the matter to a Congress. The Congress met (March, 1902), but could come to no other conclusion than that, as many of the syndicats were not

[1] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 33, July, 1901.
[2] *Ibid.*, No. 54, December, 1901.

prepared for war, some, indeed, being scarcely organised, it would be better to postpone the matter till the autumn, when the annual Congress of the Federation could adopt a decisive form of action.[1] Finally, in October, the government being still in the process of examining the question of reform, the Congress proclaimed a general strike, and on October 9, 1902, began what *La Voix du Peuple* signalized as "the gravest economic conflict that has ever broken out since the working class became conscious of its force."[2]

The strike was not a success. The miners of the Nord, Pas-de-Calais, Loire and Carmaux districts joined in the movement, but the mass was heterogeneous, having no element of unity. The majority of the strikers in the Nord and Pas-de-Calais had never forsaken their belief in political activity, had little sympathy with the revolutionists, and had been dragged into the strike against their better judgment. From the first they were anxious to make terms with their employers, and lost no time in beginning negotiations—a course of action to which they were the more impelled by the presence of the troops sent by the Government to the scene of action. Moreover the *Confédération Générale du Travail*, despite the enthusiasm for the strike of its organ, *La Voix du Peuple*, developed a scrupulousness of attitude which effectually debarred it from lending any aid to the miners. As the Federation of Miners, devoted to politics, had never joined the Confederation, the latter decided that it had neither right nor duty to interfere, and when at last the miners called upon it for aid, many of the strikers had made separate agreements with their employers, and the C.G.T. refused to support a movement which had lost its generalised character, and had dwindled down into a number of petty local squabbles.[3] For the miners of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais, never in sympathy with the strike, had destroyed

[1] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 69, March, 1902.
[2] *Ibid.*, No. 100, October, 1902.
[3] *Ibid.*, Nos. 102 and 107, November, 1902.

all its force by accepting the terms of their employers.

In fact, throughout this whole affair, both in the strike itself and in the preliminaries which led up to it, a lack of solidarity was exhibited, which from the Syndicalist standpoint was deplorable, utterly at variance as it was from the optimistic belief in proletarian unity which characterised the utterances of all the militants. Though, in theory, workmen might be supposed to merge all differences in a common hostility against Capitalism, in practice it was demonstrated, as Syndicalists themselves admitted, that solidarity gave way at the slightest fear lest particularist interests be endangered.[1] Scarcely more patently, moreover, could it have been illustrated that, whatever its persuasive power on the floor of Congress, a minority in time of action can do nothing in the face of a hostile and passive majority. If the ardour of the revolutionists had forced the masses reluctantly into revolt, it had no power, when the miseries of unemployment began to be experienced, to hold them in the bonds of solidarity, or to prevent them from escaping as quickly as possible from a situation into which they had been driven against the dictates of their own reason. In a Federation whose participation in any general strike has been repeatedly declared indispensable to success, revolutionary ideas found lodging only among the minority. The majority were pledged to more moderate methods. Under such circumstances, a general strike such as that of 1902 might be precipitated, but it could never be carried to success. Had the strike been declared at a time when redress of grievances by peaceful means lay outside the range of possibility, when the impotence of the usual trade-union methods had become too patent to be ignored, it might possibly have met with a different fate. But the grievances under which the miners chafed were actually being considered by the Government, the methods of political activity had by no means been exhausted, and

[1] *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, January, 1903, p. 191.

it was felt by the reformist majority that the strike, far from being the last desperate remedy in time of need, was but the work of revolutionary enthusiasts, anxious to give expression to a particular principle of action. It was felt that under such circumstances the cry of solidarity was only a scheme whereby a minority were endeavouring to further their own selfish interests.

Indeed, if a general strike of miners depends for its success upon the renunciation of reformist methods by the majority, it is likely never to escape failure. For the miners, indisposed to substitute for political methods a form of action in which they have met with so little success, have continued to display a marked preference for the policy of reform and participation in Parliaments. True it is that, in 1908, the Federation, which because of its political leanings had always been outside of and, to a considerable extent, in hostility with the C.G.T., at last assumed membership in that organisation; but this was not because the miners had turned revolutionists, but because, being indispensable to any general strike with pretensions to comprehensiveness, they could dictate their own terms.[1] Their presence in the Confederation can but serve to strengthen the forces of reform.[2] Hence it would seem that the lack of solidarity in revolutionary practice, which wrecked the strike of 1902, is no passing phase which time will remedy, but rather a permanent condition which must inflict irreparable damage upon the cause of Revolutionary Syndicalism in one of the most typical and indispensable of modern industries, the workers in which would, surely, be vitally necessary to every important movement of general strike.

If the dissensions among the miners displayed the lack of solidarity in the Federation, the conduct of the C.G.T. during the strike bore ample testimony to the funda-

[1] Seilhac, *La Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, October, 1908, p. 171.

[2] Cf. also E. Tavernier in the *Nineteenth Century*, November, 1910.

mental unreality of the Syndicalist theory of proletarian unity. Nothing could have been more unworthy of Revolutionary Syndicalism than the attitude of the organisation professedly devoted to its cause. For over two years the C.G.T. had been controlled by the militants of the Labour movement; it had been the centre of a propaganda in favour of the general strike which was not a little responsible for this very unrest among the miners; it had itself declared the importance of the miners in any revolutionary movement; yet when a general strike eventually was precipitated, far from leaping to the aid of the strikers, far from supporting with zeal a revolt which must have been, if only in an educative sense, of peculiar value in the cause of the proletariat, it gave way to petty jealousies, and because of differences of opinion as to method, held stubbornly aloof. Not solidarity, but self-love, self-interest, seemed to be the animating motive of the Confederation. Apparently the advantages of its support were to be bestowed, not generously, but with niggard calculation. True it is that the aid which it might have offered involved no financial contributions; but its moral support, carrying with it the more or less active sympathy of powerful Federations, should, however slight its effect, have been placed at the disposal of any body of wage-earners attempting, as the miners attempted, a serious movement in the war of Labour against Capital. Granted that the attitude of the C.G.T. was but the natural result of bitter dissensions on the question of method, the fact still remains that the unity of the labouring classes had been proved a fiction, and that the petty particularism which was here displayed, both in the Federation of Miners and in the C.G.T., contrasted very strangely with the large-sounding altruism professed in print.

The General Strike of May 1, 1906.

If it be objected that in the very aloofness of the C.G.T., however unjustified it may have been, lay the principal

cause of the failure of the miners' strike, and that Revolutionary Syndicalism in 1902 was yet too young a movement to be judged by the outcome of this early revolt, one need but turn, in reply, to a second strike which enjoyed all the advantages the first may perhaps have lacked. This is the general strike of May 1, 1906, upon which the most favourable influences seemed to converge to make it a success. The militant enthusiasm engendered by the Congress of Bourges (1904), which during the two succeeding years brought Revolutionary Syndicalism to the very height of its influence amongst organised labour, and the active support of the C.G.T. during eighteen months of propaganda and preparation, combined to give to this general strike—a general strike including the organised labour in many trades and industries—an impetus of which probably no other large operation conducted by French labourers has ever had the advantage. From the success or failure of this effort, more than of any other, can the value of the general strike as a method of action be estimated.

At the Confederal Congress of Bourges, 1904, where the principle of Revolutionary Syndicalism achieved its first formal triumph, it was resolved that an eight-hour day was indispensable to the well-being of wage-earners, that the C.G.T. had it in its power to gain this reform, and that measures should immediately be taken to put its power into operation. It was determined that the Confederation, in order to familiarise the labourers with the necessity of this reduction in hours, should devote itself to an energetic campaign of propaganda, both educative and agitative, and that on the 1st of May, 1906, the one day in the year set aside by the workers of the Continent for their demonstrations of solidarity, organised labourers in France should, by the inauguration of a general strike, declare their firm intention of working no longer than eight hours a day. Thus was to be accomplished by direct action a work which it seemed idle to expect from the hands of the Legislature.

And so, with vigour, the work began. Anxious to prove the truth of their assertion that "only what is imposed is obtained,"[1] the militants of the C.G.T. expended all their energies, all their ingenuity, all their unquestioned ability in the arts of agitation and persuasion, to rouse the working classes to a concerted effort, which would crown with success a campaign unique in history.

"Let us agitate," they cried, "let us agitate this question ceaselessly and without respite; by picture, by word, by song, by pamphlets, by every means most simple, most original, most alluring, let us sink into the obtusest brain this simple formula—'If they are willing, from May 1, 1906, the labourers of France will work but eight hours a day, with wages undiminished. Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, eight hours for education!'"[2]

Thousands of workmen who believed either that an eight-hour day was but a distant, unrealisable ideal, or that shorter hours of labour meant proportionately diminished remuneration, were persuaded by the constant efforts of the militants. For it was an alluring doctrine which was preached.

"If you desire to enjoy the pleasures of family and of living; if you wish somewhat more of well-being and of liberty; if, weary of long days of labour, you would have your yoke lightened, that you might instruct and educate yourself; if, finally, you desire to diminish the deadly employment to which you are all exposed, prepare to put into practice the eight-hour day on May 1, 1906. Do not forget that one obtains only what one imposes."[3]

From the point of view of publicity the campaign achieved a very considerable degree of success. The activities of the C.G.T. must surely have made all wage-earners in France aware of the enticing fact that the very considerable advantages attached to the eight-hour day were at their disposal, were they but to make the

[1] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 211, November, 1904.
[2] *Ibid.*, No. 217, December, 1904.
[3] *Ibid.* No. 211, November, 1904.

required effort. Certainly, if the success of the campaign can be judged from the effect which it had upon the public in general, nothing more could have been desired. In Paris, the storm-centre of any threatened national movement, where the propaganda had been most active, the possessing classes were in a state of panic. Many foresaw a social revolution. Preparations were made in anticipation of trouble which could scarcely have been more extensive had Paris been trembling before a coming siege. Capital was transformed into movables. Meats and provisions were stored away for emergencies. Prices began to soar. And, as the day approached, peasants from the environs, fearful of plunder, refused to bring their goods to market. No less was the anxiety in Government circles. Threatened with a strike which was virtually a revolt, alarmed by a rumour that behind the whole movement was a nationalist and reactionary plot to overthrow the Republic, the Government took very decided measures to prevent any outbreak. Some of the militant Syndicalists were arrested, and Paris was almost delivered into the hands of soldiers and special police.[1]

The movement, however, utterly failed to justify either the expectations of the Syndicalists or the fears of the people. The first of May in Paris was a day of terror, the streets were practically deserted, but no damage was done, no violence committed, and when the day was over and the employers to a man had refused to grant the eight-hour day, the majority of workers accepted the refusal with scarcely a protest. Big Federations, like those of the railwaymen, textile workers, and miners, made no movement whatever, and while some ninety-three organisations went on strike, and stayed on strike, they constituted a minority of organised labour and were, with the exception of the Lithographers, Typographers, and Metallurgists, comparatively small and revolutionary bodies.[2] Nor did those which struck gain the object

[1] *La Revue Socialiste*, July, 1906, p. 99, *et seq.*

[2] Cf. the list in Kritsky, *L'Évolution du Syndicalisme*, p. 360.

for which they were supposed to be striving. Nowhere was the eight-hour day obtained. And if in some trades ameliorations were gained, it must be remembered both that such gains were not the professed aim of the strike, and that they were far out-balanced by the losses incurred. It is estimated that the striking unions, taken as a whole, gained 1,021,177 francs and lost 6,370,685 francs in this movement, that many were compelled to return on absolutely unconditional terms and that the only considerable advantages won fell to the Typographers' Union, one of the least revolutionary of all the participating organisations.[1] To some of the strikers, indeed, the movement brought great disappointment and disillusion. Of such a notable example is the Federation of Lithographers, which, under the influence of a militant secretary, had temporarily abandoned the reformist tactics of the *Fédération du Livre* and had flung itself boldly into the strike. The results were disastrous.

"Our Federation," declared a circular of 1909,[2] "which was among the first to attempt to put into practice the decision of the Congress of Bourges relative to the eight-hour day, was heavily hit by the consequences of the inaction of the majority of other organisations. Profound gaps appeared in our Federation as a result of conflicts which we had to sustain almost single-handed, and under very little more it would have succumbed to the crisis it passed through. Destroying many of our illusions, the movement of 1906 proved to us above all that, if it is easy enough to stir up the labouring masses, their action will be effective only on condition that the majority be educated for their part, and be able, in the critical moment, to take the time necessary to obtain their demands."

Here is disclosed the essential cause of the failure. The movement was a movement of a minority. The pressure brought to bear upon the employers was comparatively insignificant. Nor were any of the great public services affected; industries such as mining, transport, food

[1] Weill, *Histoire du Mouvement Social en France*, p. 376.
[2] *La Revue Socialiste*, June, 1909, pp. 550–554.

supply and lighting, remaining utterly untouched. Such a rising as that of 1906, unless it is extensive enough to cause the most severe dislocation of industry, and sufficiently organised to resist all the repressive efforts of Capitalism and the State, must inevitably involve the strikers in disaster. And this movement of 1906, though the greatest power of which the C.G.T. was capable had been lavished to make it a success, fulfilled neither of these conditions. Federations like that of the railway workers, whose co-operation would have been of great importance, failed, as M. Pouget himself sorrowfully confessed, "to vibrate in unison with the other corporations." [1] Even before the great event took place, those who had been most enthusiastic in the work of propaganda, had been driven to the conclusions that the masses were almost unaffected, and had ceased to believe in the movement. Indeed, according to the evidence of M. Merrheim, one of the most militant members of a most militant Federation (of Metallurgy), had it not been for the insistence of M. Pouget, of *La Voix du Peuple*, and M. Griffuelhes, secretary of the C.G.T., the secretaries of the Federations would have cancelled the whole affair.[2]

It is characteristic of Syndicalist writers that, disappointed with the material results of the strike (and they admitted that it had failed to come up to expectations),[3] they should fall back on its moral value. According to M. Pouget, the most indefatigable defender of the movement, the eight-hour day was not so much a reform actually expected to be achieved, as a battle cry to rally the workers, a sort of myth, like Sorel's idea of the general strike. Hence to seek material results is beside the point. It was the act of solidarity for which the entire propaganda was set in motion. And as every such act is a gymnastic from which is engendered an increase of force and conscious power, it is in this increase, not in any

[1] *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, December, 1906, p. 383.
[2] *Ibid.*, *La Crise Syndicaliste*, December, 1909, p. 293.
[3] Cf. Pouget, *Ibid.*, July, 1906, p. 276.

material gain, that its justification is to be found. For not only has the working class become more class-conscious, but it has had a glimpse of what it can do, when it has the will to try.[1]

Surely this is but mental juggling. The idea that the eight-hour day was a mere battle-cry is nothing but a post-strike invention. Even in the most philosophic circles it was not mentioned before the strike took place. And as to the moral effects, it is obvious that if the majority refuse to indulge in "gymnastic," its educative value as a preparation either for similar movements or for the revolution itself is well-nigh negligible. Moreover, among the minority who were persuaded to move, the demoralisation and disorganisation caused by material losses constitute a heavy discount on the value of these exercises in revolutionism. Organisations which were compelled to accept the unconditional terms of their employers, Federations like that of the Lithographers, which almost went to pieces as a result of the strike, cannot have received the moral advantages extolled by the editor of *La Voix du Peuple*. Far from being rendered, through the one act of solidarity, more capable of making another, they would be for years, perhaps indefinitely, turned to those paths of reform which Revolutionary Syndicalists abhor. In short, no intellectual ingenuity can overcome the evidence of defeat. The strike of May 1, 1906, though it was the most ambitious, the most comprehensive of all the movements undertaken under the banner of the C.G.T., though it had been preceded by a work of preparation which should have ensured success, if success by such methods is ever to be attained, was, as an example of the general strike on a large scale, a most noteworthy failure. And it failed primarily, as all such strikes are bound to fail, because, despite the most active efforts of the militants, the majority of organised labour—in fact, the majority of labourers in the Confederation—took no part in the movement.

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 276 *et seq.*

The Railway Strike of 1910.

In a somewhat different fashion the railway strike of October, 1910, furnishes another example of the failure of Syndicalist tactics; not at all because it had received a preparation to be compared with that which made the strike of May, 1906, unique, but because it had been precipitated by a revolutionary minority against the wishes of the great mass of wage-earners, and before adequate preparation had been made to ensure its success. No better illustration could have been afforded of the ill-considered zeal engendered by a revolutionary theory preached with too little consideration for practical issues, and of the disastrous results for Labour which the application of such a theory carries in its train.

The National Syndicat of Railway Workers had been for over a decade a reformist organisation. A general strike, attempted in 1898 for the acquisition of the eight-hour day, had been a disastrous failure, many of the local unions had been wiped out, those which survived had undergone injuries from which they took years to recover, and in the discouragement and disillusion which followed, revolutionary ambitions all but disappeared. Under the leadership of a very able secretary, M. Guérard, one of the most prominent of reformist Syndicalists, the railway workers devoted their energies to less violent measures. Even the propaganda preceding the strike of May, 1906, had been unable to turn them from these peaceful paths. In 1910, however, the revolutionists revived their activity. Encouraged by the postal strike of 1909, which, though unsuccessful, had proved that Syndicalist ideas had the power to spread in the most unfavourable quarters, the militants among the railwaymen, through the organ of the Syndicat, *La Tribune de la Voie Ferrée*, began to agitate for a general strike. A grievance was easy to discover. There was a general dissatisfaction over wages, which they were not slow to foment. The usual propaganda was carried on. Meetings, pamphlets, and various forms of public manifesta-

tions, combined with a stubborn attitude on the part of the companies to foster the spirit of revolt. Under the influence of the militants, anxious to recruit their fighting force, men who had previously held aloof hastened to join the Syndicat, whose membership during 1909 increased, in round numbers, from 22,000 to 60,000, reaching a total of almost 100,000 by the time of the strike in October, 1910.[1] Unfortunately the revolutionary ardour, which had been awakened, succeeded in rendering this great acquisition of strength quite useless. Excited by the refusal of their employers to meet their demands, a small but impetuous body of employés of the Nord Railway anticipated the movement of their fellow workers and struck; while the Committee of General Strike, though "pained at these manifestations of impatience" and regretting the dilemma into which this practical move had thrown it, decided to generalise the affair.[2] Not only were the rest of the Nord employés called out, but a general strike was declared on all the lines of France.

The movement was a total failure. The great mass of the workers had not wanted it, nor had they lent their support to the agitation which precipitated it. It had been fostered by a minority, who, in their desire to display their zeal in the cause of Revolutionary Syndicalism, had failed to consider whether such a strike was opportune, and were utterly ignorant of the conditions under which it might have succeeded.[3] As it was, in many parts of the country there occurred only a partial movement, in others no movement at all. The systems of the Est, P.L.M. and Orleans Railways were scarcely affected, the Midi experienced only a partial agitation, and even on the lines of the Nord and the State-owned Ouest, where the strike was to a large extent concentrated, the majority of employés took no part. If anything was needed to complete the discomfiture of the strikers,

[1] *La Revue Socialiste*, November, 1910, pp. 394–5.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 415.
[3] *Ibid.*, December, 1910, p. 490.

it was supplied by the action of the Briand Government, which, partly because it constituted one of the affected employers, partly because of the necessity of maintaining a service indispensable to the public, called out the troops to replace the discontents, and even went so far as to declare a railway strike, according to an old statute of 1845, illegal. Under such circumstances defeat was inevitable. And in fact, within a week the strike had come to an end, the workers had resumed their duties, and the Syndicalist journals were seeking excuses for the failure.

But what excuse could there be, save the obvious one that the strike had been precipitated before the Committee had completed its preparations? And doubtful enough is this solitary excuse, if advanced to defend the favourite tactics of Syndicalism. Nothing could have been a more natural outcome of the spread of Revolutionary Syndicalism than the ill-considered precipitancy which caused the failure of this general strike. When wage-earners are informed, with an insistence that carries conviction, that the material results of strikes are as nothing compared with their moral and educative value as acts, when they are assured, too, that it is the spontaneous outburst rather than the carefully premeditated performance that constitutes the truest act of solidarity, what is there to be surprised at, what to complain of, if some of them rush into a strike on the first semblance of a grievance, careless of a preparation that is condemned as artificial, and faithfully believing that their movement will be the signal for a spontaneous rising of their fellow-labourers, a rising more valuable than all the organised attempts ever engineered? The railway strike of 1910 cannot be taken as a test whereby to judge the success or failure of a well-managed general strike (for one thing, the C.G.T. was not behind it); but no movement better represents the evils which accrue to Labour from the insistent preaching of the peculiar tactics of Revolutionary Syndicalism. Too many strikes in France, like this of the railway workers, seem almost to have been a mere practising

ground for revolutionists anxious to apply their theories, revolutionists, who from their teachers have gathered far too little sense of the realities of things, and who in their enthusiasm for certain general ideas bring much undeserved misery upon a class which has too much to bear already. Though a form of action which involves so much risk of privation and even of positive misery for its participants, is one which should be used only with the greatest consideration, it is the unfortunate result of revolutionary propaganda that the general strike is brought into requisition with no discrimination, and applied with a startling and disastrous consistency to every possible occasion. The general strike may or may not have its advantages, but the unqualified practice in which Syndicalists indulge is an evil which no dispassionate critic will deny.

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The fate of these three strikes is by no means exceptional. Failure seems to be the rule. Equally disastrous was the strike of the Postal and Telegraph employés of 1909. Just as little success has rewarded the dock-labourers in their various attempts to indulge in general strikes. It is the success, not the failure, which is the exception. One or two efforts, such as the dramatic but hardly typical strike of the electricians of Paris in 1907, stand out conspicuous for the cause of Syndicalism, and have given an encouragement to Syndicalists which the usual course of general strikes by no means warranted. For it has become almost a truism to assert that the more generalised the movement the less its chances of success. And this despite the strength which, in France, is supposed to be derived from the spontaneousness of such risings.

It might of course be asserted, and with no little justice, that such movements as general strikes, even in a single industry, must enjoy a very considerable degree of unanimous support among the wage-earners, if the opposition of the employers is to be overcome, it being

natural to suppose that a general strike will arouse the most stubborn resistance on the part of Capital. But it seems to be just this unanimity which has been particularly lacking in the examples which have been cited. Hence no fair test has been made, for in every case there were divisions among the wage-earners on the question of method which made success almost impossible. It might be objected that the lack of discipline among the French unions, the lack of financial backing for strikes, so lessens their powers of resistance that they have not the force to carry through the sustained effort required in a movement of any general character; and that consequently it is to the future rather than to the present, when organisations are, even yet, comparatively young, that the victories of the general strike belong.

To this it may be replied that in England, where discipline and organisation and finance among the unions have reached a high degree of development, the general strike has met with no better fate. Take the Miners' strike of 1912, a movement with every apparent chance of success. The organisation of the miners was excellent. They possessed strike funds most considerable in amount. The employés of almost all the great collieries joined the movement, and there was displayed throughout the course of the strike a power of cohesion, a degree of fidelity to and a confidence in the decisions of the committee, that was unshaken even under the greatest hardships, and that made the resistance notable in the history of strikes. If the immediate aim of the strikers was to dislocate the industry of a nation, the result of their efforts left little to be desired. The plants of many industries closed down, the production of others curtailed, the railways crippled, fellow-labourers in other industries thrown out of employment, the wealthy inconvenienced, people of moderate means seriously alarmed, the poor reduced to misery and privation by the rising prices of necessities—here was a state of things serious enough to impress on the most unimpressionable the fact general strikers are con-

stantly and energetically proclaiming, that labourers are essential to production, and that in their refusal to produce except under reasonable terms lies a power of causing trouble which must reduce employers to terms. And yet the strike was not a success. The miners were in the end compelled to return to work, without having forced from their employers the reforms they had set out to obtain. In the struggle of endurance the resources of the workers proved inferior, far inferior, and while the employers, as a body, were by no means hard pressed, the miners, their material support exhausted, were driven, from very physical helplessness, to give up their great endeavour. If there were employers, and those the majority, who would have been willing to grant the demands of the strikers, it was not from fear of their power but from pity for their distresses.

But if the well-organised strike of the English miners could not succeed, affecting as it did the industry of a whole nation, what other strike could? If the organised power of English strikes has as little effect, when employers determine on resistance, as the boasted spontaneity of French movements, how will success ever be achieved? In fact, material success by such methods seems well-nigh unattainable. The common experience of general strikes seems to point to the unmistakeable if humiliating fact that, if Capital adopts the attitude of uncompromising resistance, the very necessities of the wage-earners will invariably bring them to surrender. A few weeks of unemployment must exhaust their resources and, with starvation staring them in the face, the end of their strivings is near. And it is just in general strikes that the resistance of Capital is almost certain to be uncompromising. Doubtless there are employers who would yield rather than undergo the losses occasioned by a wholesale strike. But in general strikes the questions at issue are usually of vital importance, questions on which employers could yield only by inflicting what they would consider grave damage to their most essential

interests. Nor as a rule are employers disposed to encourage a very destructive method of industrial warfare by allowing it, except under a compulsion which the workers could not exert, any measure of success. For principle's sake, if for no other reason, they would be strongly inclined to fight to the last ditch. And if such be their determination, so great are their resources compared with those of the labourers that a general strike could only end in disaster for the strikers, disaster from which, their funds exhausted, their ranks demoralised, they would be long in recovering. Capital to-day is organised as well as Labour, and against that organisation general strikes, whether they derive their strength from preparation and careful discipline or from spontaneous manifestations of solidarity, whether they are of the English or the French type, will be of no avail.

Moreover, in view of the disastrous results, from a material standpoint, of the general strike, its exponents, in their attempt, by falling back on its moral and educative value, to evade the odium which such results are bound to heap on this characteristic form of Syndicalism, are but deceiving themselves. It is not a sufficient justification of a general strike that, apart from results, it has enabled the workers to perform an act of solidarity, and developed bonds of unity which perhaps had not existed before. It is not enough that a movement has actually taken place; there must be something in the movement which will encourage its participants to undertake another. But this something is lacking in a series of unsuccessful general strikes. A spirit of fellowship may indeed be evoked, the bonds which unite workers may be drawn closer, by a strike, even though it be unsuccessful, but this unity, this fellowship, this solidarity, will find their next expression far more readily and naturally in the work of social peace, in arbitration or trade agreements, in the quieter though not less effective forms of Syndicalism, than in a repetition of a method of action in which the labourers have met with failure. The Lithographers

whose organisation almost went to pieces as a result of the events of 1906; the Railway workers, sustaining a check in 1898 from which they recovered only after years of patient rebuilding; and all the many unions which in France, as in other countries, have undergone the demoralisation and disorganisation which a defeat carries in its train, can testify that the effect of a general strike, which goes against the strikers, is not educative but destructive; that under such treatment the Labour movement is not advanced, but receives a set-back, the results of which it takes years to counteract, and that, far from being disposed to further revolutionary action, disillusioned unions are glad enough to welcome the advances of those who preach the more moderate tactics of reform. A working class, which is enabled continually to progress from one successful general strike to another, might develop an enthusiasm for such practice which would carry the industrial world very near to a social revolution, but those who have experienced the bitterness of a series of defeats will inevitably lose their faith, despite all the influence of natural militancy, in the professions of Revolutionary Syndicalism. For, on the morrow of a movement ending in disaster, to praise its educative value—educative in the sense of preparation for another similar effort—is to lose one's sense of reality, and soar into the regions where for every conceivable contingency one can spin a theory.

In short, the general strike, despite its allurements and its apparent simplicity, is not a weapon adapted for the use of Labour. It is impotent as a means either of achieving material reforms or of accomplishing the social revolution. It might be asserted without fear of contradiction that the more important the occasion for which its use is proposed, the more powerless it is for good, the more fraught with disaster for the workers. Revolutionists on the Continent have decked it with every allurement, they have invested it with the glory of the class war, to which the Continental labourer more than any other is susceptible, but they have failed to carry it to more than

an occasional success. It has been adopted by workers, such as English Trade Unionists, with no revolutionary bearings, but as a means for winning immediate reforms; it has enjoyed the advantages which one of the finest Labour organisations in the world was able to bestow upon it. Yet it has been utterly inefficient against the powers and resources of organised Capital. The peculiar method of Syndicalism breaks down in practice, and with the failure of the ordinary form the success of the revolutionary general strike becomes a patent impossibility. Moreover, if, as some Syndicalist philosophers assert, the revolutionary general strike is but a myth, set up to evoke the revolutionary activities of the proletariat, it is an evil myth, encouraging a method of action disastrous for those who practise it. If the cause of Labour is to be spared deep humiliation, if the patient efforts of years are not to be rendered fruitless, these huge and comprehensive movements which are the feature of Syndicalism in practice must be given up. And if the labouring class has lost its faith in partial strikes, trade agreements, and parliamentary activity, it must devise some new method more capable of doing them service, and free from the evils inevitably associated with the general strike.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE METHOD OF REVOLUTION.

THE general strike, with its minimum of good and its maximum of harm for wage-earners, has been more or less officially adopted as part of their programme by the labourers of many industrial countries; but, it is to be noted, with no necessarily revolutionary implications, but simply as one means, among others, for the advancement of the cause of Labour. Among Revolutionary Syndicalists, however, as has been explained, it is a part of a very definite programme and policy of revolution. General strikes, far from being mere weapons for the winning of material advantages, are rather a series of steps leading to the final *levée-en-masse* which will usher in a new economic order. They are episodes in the class war—expressions of the revolution which is transferring to the proletariat the rights and privileges of the bourgeoisie. As such they imply, nay more, they demand, among those who practise them, an acceptance of the theory of class war, the theory of revolutionary activity. Above all must there be, among the masses of labourers, a real and active spirit of revolution, if they are to be rendered capable even of attempting that final and revolutionary general strike, which to Sorel may be but a social myth, but which to the practical leaders of Syndicalism seems to be an actual end in view.

At first thought, one would be inclined, considering the results of general strikes of a minor sort in the past, to regard the revolutionary general strike as an absolute impossibility, a chimera, the pursuit of which can lead to

nothing. Unable to carry to a successful conclusion a general strike in a single industry, how is it to be expected that the labourers of France, or any other country, could cope with the problems involved in a *levée-en-masse* of a nation? And among the discouragements and demoralisation caused by a series of defeats, how is the proletariat to be educated in the practice of revolution? How, indeed, is the spirit of revolution itself to spread among a class which seems to obtain so few material gains from their revolutionary activities? For even the most ardent of idealists cannot for ever remain unaffected by adverse material considerations. Yet as Syndicalists persist, despite such criticisms, in believing in the possibility of a regeneration of society by revolutionary methods, still hope to rally to their cause, if not all the labouring class, at least sufficient of them (above all the militant and the capable among them) to carry through to success their revolutionary programme, it remains to examine to what extent their hopes are built on solid ground, whether class war actually is, as they aver, a method of solving the Labour problem, attractive enough to draw the workers who count.

In the first place, it is to be noted that only a small percentage, a small minority of wage-earners, even in France, are, as far as seems ascertainable, partisans of revolutionary methods. Consider the facts of the matter. It would hardly be denied that almost all that is revolutionary in the labouring class of France is contained within the boundaries of the *Confédération Générale du Travail*. So active has been the propaganda of militancy in the C.G.T., so alert and capable its leaders, so alluring and so constant its invitations to all labourers to participate in the duties and privileges of union, that outside this famous organisation there can be little if any strength left, which would be devoted willingly to the cause of class war. Yet the forces which it commands are comparatively small. Far from enjoying the undivided strength of the working class, the C.G.T., as has been

already pointed out,[1] included in 1910 something over 36 per cent. of organised labour, and organised labour itself can scarcely amount to 25 per cent., at a liberal estimate, of the total number of wage-earners. Nor is this all. Even in the C.G.T., the professed stronghold of revolution, revolutionists are in the minority. If, during the last decade, it has been under the control of revolutionary leaders, if its public utterances have been warlike and uncompromising, it must not therefore be assumed that revolution is the hope and policy of the rank-and-file. When the Congress of Bourges in 1904, and the Congress of Amiens in 1906, upheld by substantial majorities the principles of Revolutionary Syndicalism, only those who were ignorant of the peculiar kind of organisation which both the C.G.T. and its Congresses have adopted, were led to conclude that the wage-earners of France were, in the main, active partisans of violence and class war. Under the influence of a general hostility to the characteristic methods of democracy, affected to some extent, also, by a desire to equalise differences arising from unavoidable circumstances, the C.G.T., early in its career, pledged itself to a system of representation which gives birth to deception, lending the revolutionists an appearance of power which has comparatively slight foundation in reality, and concealing in what has been aptly termed a *révolutionisme de façade* the moderate tendencies of its main body of adherents.[2]

Proportional representation, that invention of democracy, has been, and is to this day, rejected by the C.G.T. That mere numbers can constitute any basis for determining representation, no Revolutionary Syndicalist will admit for a moment. It is consistent with their enthusiasm for the action of "conscious minorities" that they are utterly unwilling to grant to, say, 10,000 members ten times the number of representatives allowed to 1,000. Considering that small unions are small, and large unions

[1] Chap. II. p. 46.
[2] *La Revue Socialiste*, June, 1904, p. 554.

large, not through any fault or merit of their own, but very largely from the circumstances of the industry to which they happen to belong, the genuine Revolutionary Syndicalist considers proportional representation a scheme which outrages the sense of equality, takes unfair advantage of unavoidable limitations, crushes the smaller unions, paralyses their revolutionary tendencies, and discourages the efforts of the militants.[1] Appealing to the facts of experience, the opponents of proportional representation throw contempt on mere majorities as ignorant, superstitious, devoid of ambition, willing to submit to any kind of exploitation, and refuse to countenance any arrangement which will enable such unpromising material to crush the vigorous and progressive minorities, whose action in every matter of importance is always indispensable and always decisive.[2] Nor will they give their support to a purely mechanical calculation of figures which determines the influence and power of any body of men by their mere numbers, as if intellectual capacity and zeal in the cause of the wage-earner did not enter into the question.

Under the influence of such motives the C.G.T. adopted its system of representation. In the elections of the committees of administration, organisations, not individuals, form the basis of representation. The two Federal Committees which manage the affairs of the C.G.T., representing on the one hand the Section of Federations, on the other the Section of *Bourses du travail*, consist, respectively, of one delegate from each Federation and one delegate from each *Bourse du travail*. In the Congresses held every other year, one vote is accorded to each syndicat, irrespective of size, which can claim membership in the *Confédération Générale du Travail*. Now, whatever the validity of the arguments in favour of such a scheme of "one organisation, one vote," its apparent effect has been

[1] *VIII^e Congrès national corporatif*, Bourges, 1904. *Comp Rendu*, p. 147.

[2] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 43, September, 1901.

to avoid the tyranny of large unions over small, only to fall into the tyranny of small unions over large. Thus in 1906, the *Fédération des Mineurs* with 46,000 members, the *Fédération du Livre* with 10,000, the *Fédération du Textile* with 10,000, and the *Syndicat National des Travailleurs des Chemins de fer* with 24,000, were permitted, each, exactly the same representation in the Federal Committee as the *Fédération des Blanchisseurs* with a membership of 200. In the same year, while ten of the larger Federations had a total membership of 106,000—over half the number of wage-earners adhering to the C.G.T.—they enjoyed the privilege of but ten votes out of sixty-four in the Federal Committee. Precisely the same state of affairs reigns in the Congresses, where the smaller syndicats have every advantage. For example, at the Congress of Amiens, 1906, a body of 18,000 workmen organised in ten large syndicats had but ten votes, while another body of 13,850 workmen, because they happened to be grouped in small unions, enjoyed a voting power of 206.[1] At the Congress of Bourges, 1904, under this régime of "one syndicat, one vote," twenty votes were controlled by 5,896 men, twenty more by 32,750, ten by 42,200, and six by 60,450 : the result being that some 100,000 men could be constantly out-voted by 5,000.[2]

But a system which hands all power over to the smaller organisations is all in favour of the revolutionists, for the smaller organisations, mobile, passionate, easily moved, are of all the most revolutionary. It is commonly estimated by writers who are neither reformist nor revolutionary Syndicalists, that the revolutionists in the C.G.T. are a minority, holding their control only by the system of representation which exists in that organisation to-day, and which seems impossible to uproot, except by a self-denying ordinance which the smaller unions are

[1] Seilhac, *La Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, October, 1908, pp. 171, 172.

[2] *VIII^e Congrès national corporatif*, Bourges, 1914, *Compte Rendu*.

little likely to issue.[1] Doubtless revolutionary ideas are not a monoply of the smaller organisations, nor are the larger all pledged to reform. The Federations of Metallurgy, Marine, and Building Trades, three of the largest of the Federations adhering to the C.G.T., are one and all revolutionary, and the loss to revolutionary power occasioned by their meagre representation must be considered in any assertion of minority rule in the C.G.T. On the other hand, the attitude of these very Federations to the system of representation which, it is asserted, gives revolutionism its control, seems to attest the truth of the allegation. They, if any, must suffer by the lack of proportional representation. They, if any, should feel objections to a system which gives them a power so little in proportion to their strength. Yet they have shown themselves the most ardent defenders of the *status quo*.[2] Such an attitude seems explicable only on the supposition that the policy of the smaller syndicats satisfies the revolutionary aspirations of these militant organisations.

Whatever advantages such a system may bestow upon a revolutionary minority, it is obvious that it engenders a revolutionism which is a *façade* revolutionism. It is one thing to vote resolutions on the floor of a congress, quite another to carry them into effect. It is no easy matter to induce large masses of wage-earners to join in the execution of movements to which they are opposed, but this seems to be the problem imposed upon revolutionists by the system of minority rule. However admirable their efforts to effect the representation of minorities, they have succeeded only in evolving a scheme which gives them control without power, and the questionable privilege of voting decisions which, in only too many cases, it is quite impossible to execute. For in

[1] Cf. Franck, *Les Bourses du Travail et la Confédération Générale du Travail*, and Pawlowski, *La Confédération Générale du Travail*.

[2] Cf. *VIII^e Congrès national corporatif*, Bourges, 1904, *Compte Rendu*.

the large movements in which the Syndicalists see the form *par excellence* of the revolt of Labour against Capital, the powers of an active minority must break down before the sullen opposition of a majority out of sympathy with its ideals. Influential a minority may be, nay more, in many instances its action is decisive. But it is a condition of its success that it be only the inertia, the indifference, not the opposition of the stolid majority which must be overcome. A revolutionary minority can break down the mere lethargy of a majority ultimately capable of revolution, but all its endeavours must fail before a majority desirous of reform. Revolutionary Syndicalism, just because it is primarily a method of action, runs the gravest risk of failure. For action of this peculiar sort, though it requires the leadership and stimulus of an active minority, needs, too, what in Revolutionary Syndicalism to-day it seems unlikely to obtain, the support of the "sheep-like unthinking majority." Under no other circumstances can a method, which relies on the stoppage of industry by a labouring class, have any chance of success.

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Thus does it appear that even in France, where ideas of violence and revolution fall on peculiarly favourable ground, Reformist rather than Revolutionary Syndicalism is the policy of the majority of wage-earners. Even the revolutionary traditions of the French labourers do not seem to have settled the question of method. In France, as elsewhere, the organisations of Labour are experiencing the age-long struggle of revolution and reform. That a class forms a more powerful bond of union than a party, that the reform of the material conditions of living constitutes a programme more capable of holding the mass of wage-earners than any political programme ever invented, there is good reason to believe; but this unanimity as to the end to be pursued carries with it no guarantee that there will be harmony over the question of method. The labouring class, like any other class, is not homogeneous. Within it are every variety of opinion, every shade of tem-

perament. Differences of religion, differences of politics, differences of philosophy, may be found there as elsewhere. Conservatives and Liberals, Radicals and Reactionaries, Socialists and Individualists, flourish among wage-earners as among the other classes. The Timid and the Militant, the Reformist and the Revolutionary, are equally at home in Labour circles. After all, there is, and can be, no monopoly in such matters. It is a far from settled problem whether economic changes should be brought about by reform or by revolution, yet it is just this problem on which it is essential for the success of Syndicalism that a considerable degree of unanimity be secured.

It may doubtless happen, in the stress of hard times such as seem to recur periodically in every industrial country, that the labouring class as a whole will be prepared to adopt the most vigorous methods for the betterment of their conditions, that in many trades the workers will be willing to rise *en masse* to obtain the reforms which they desire. The most moderate of men, brought face to face with peculiarly hard and grinding circumstances, becomes a temporary advocate of violent and revolutionary means. But by the majority of wage-earners the methods of class war seem to be regarded as but occasional expedients suited to particular conditions, methods of which the use becomes not only unnecessary but positively harmful when those conditions disappear. If the English trade unions, for instance, have become infected with the doctrines of Syndicalism, it is rather because they are experiencing more poignantly now than for many years the limitations which the capitalistic system puts upon them, than that they are drifting towards revolutionary methods for the satisfaction of their needs. If it is true of France, surely also it is true of any other industrial country, that at least one-half of the wage-earners are, in the normal course of events, passive, if not active advocates of the methods of reform rather than revolution, and that of their leaders, those who constitute the active minority whose virtue the Syndicalist loves to extol, there

are as many followers of the doctrines of solidarity as exponents of class war. Syndicalists the wage-earners as a body may be, but Revolutionary Syndicalism is confined, and always will be confined, to a minority. For it is one thing to advocate direct action, quite another to limit its scope to those revolutionary forms, particularly the general strike, which are characteristic of the Syndicalism of a Sorel, a Lagardelle, or a Pouget.

If the difficulty of imposing a revolutionary practice upon the labouring class is primarily due to the temperamental objections of the majority of wage-earners, it is undoubtedly enhanced by the opposition to class war of the powerful non-wage-earning classes, and by their ceaseless efforts—efforts crowned with a large measure of success—to induce workingmen, by adequate reforms in the existing system, to follow more moderate counsels than those with which Revolutionary Syndicalists are accustomed to importune them. Among employers, for instance, despite Syndicalist assertions of the incompatibility of Capital and Labour, there are thousands who, far from being willing to sharpen the antagonism of classes, and by ruthless egoistic onrush of the capitalistic system facilitate the approach of the social revolution, are the first, not only to recognise and deplore the evils whereby labourers are surrounded, but to use every means at their disposal to remove them. By trade agreements, less frequently by profit-sharing and co-partnership, the burden of the wage-system is being lightened; and if the mass of labourers are as yet but little affected, it is not because such peaceful solutions are of merely local application, but because they have to combat all the inertia of a long-established system, all the conservatism pervading a class in the possession of wealth and property. Syndicalists have sufficient cause for pessimism, if they rest their hopes for the rejuvenation of society on the existence of a warlike vigour among the capitalists, the bourgeoisie. The unbending hostility of Capital towards Labour is, under the influence of a social rather than an individualist

morality, gradually disappearing. Near at hand is the time when the conscience of the community will not permit the ruthless egoism in the march of industry, which (in theory at least) Syndicalists profess to admire. The morals of Socialism, if not its economic doctrines, are permeating all classes to-day, and the expansion of such moral ideas promises to engender, not at all a spirit of strife, but rather such a desire for solidarity among all the classes of the State as would be entirely fatal to the prospects of class war. Whether Syndicalists are right in their assertion that the devotion of a community to the methods of social peace could but result in its own decadence, only the future can decide; but the fact remains that the tendencies of a majority, both of the labouring class and of other classes, are finding expression in an amount of conciliation between Capital and Labour, and in a body of legislation to remove the evils of the wage-system, that will seriously counteract all the efforts of the revolutionists.

The labour legislation alone, to which the enlightened consciences of their citizens will more and more commit the Governments of industrial nations, and the progress of which only a complete reversal of the tendencies of society could retard, would be sufficient, despite the slowness with which the machinery of Parliament grinds it out, to make the average labourer tolerant of the existing order, or at least to give him patience till it be gradually abolished. That there will always be doctrinaire Socialists and Syndicalists, who regard reform as equivalent to the perpetuation of the capitalistic system, is inevitable. Nor will there cease to be occasions when, because of the peculiar harshness of economic conditions, the revolutionaries will for the time gain the ear even of moderate men. But the majority of workingmen will never be enlisted permanently under the banner of any party, the foundation of whose method of action is class war.

The tendency towards reform induced by tempera-

ment and by the blandishments of economic legislation is strengthened by the experience of the effect of revolutionary doctrine. In France, for example, where the class war has been preached with exceptional vigour, the activities of the labour organisations, under the influence of Revolutionary Syndicalism, have been lavished with indiscriminate zeal upon the carrying on of strikes. A means for the defence of labour interests, which is recognised as efficient and justifiable when used opportunely and with moderation, to which economists and statesmen have given their support, and which modern States acknowledge as a right pertaining to those who toil, the strike has become, in Syndicalism, a dangerous and a two-edged weapon, only too frequently disastrous for those who try to wield it. Carried away by their theories, Syndicalists have urged the unions to strikes for which they were unprepared, the consequences of which they had not considered, and when defeat was a foregone conclusion. They have extended the scope of strikes when every effort should have been made toward limitation, and have precipitated movements for no other reason than to show the solidarity among the workers. Whether in accordance with or despite the wishes of the Syndicalist philosophers, their doctrine of class war has found expression in a practice which, too often, has uselessly exhausted the resources of the unions, and spread discouragement among their members. Certain it is that the forces of reform will be swelled by many who have seen unions, not only disorganised, but often destroyed, by strikes which might and should have been avoided, and who can have but little liking for a doctrine which, by a wholesale and indiscriminate application, results in seriously weakening the power for good of a useful form of action. And it is equally certain that the very considerable section of the population which stands outside these conflicts of Capital and Labour, but which in the dislocation of industry invariably loses, no matter which side wins, will bring to bear all their powers (powers becoming better and better

organised) to resist the uncalculating zeal which tends to increase the number of strikes.

Another example of the evils which the propagation of the gospel of class war engenders, and of the hostility to revolutionary methods which those evils inevitably occasion, is to be found in the practice of *sabotage*. The practice of *sabotage* embodies so much that is objectionable, so much that seems actually foreign to the spirit of Syndicalism, that one is tempted to the conclusion that there has been a more or less general misunderstanding of the doctrines preached by its high priests. For in this method of action, as understood by practical Syndicalists and as put into practice by the rank-and-file of the labourers, there is something entirely out of keeping with the idealism pervading the writings of Sorel, Berth and Lagardelle. With whatever casuistry one may attempt to justify damage done to the interests of employers, either by deterioration of work or by destruction of property, it cannot be denied that these methods find their origin in a mistaken, if natural, extension of the ideas of violence and class war set forth by Syndicalist philosophers. Take the writings of Georges Sorel. When he speaks of class war it is evident from the general spirit of his writings, not that he is advocating an actual war between classes in which, as in any war, such methods may be used as will do damage to the interests of the enemy, but rather that he is setting forth a convenient formula whereby may be expressed the fact, which no Syndicalist doubts, that the interests of Capital and Labour are absolutely incompatible and that, as any attempts to achieve solidarity can only perpetuate the evils of the present, the labouring classes must remain hostile to Capitalism until it shall have been abolished. If he is as admirer of violence, he is referring not to material damage, but to those legal acts of hostility such as strikes, which serve to express the antagonism of classes. Unfortunately, the labourers have taken his words too literally. How could they be expected to discern the illuminating fact that Sorel, a

stranger to the world of labour, one who never participated in its conflicts, was but admiring violence from afar, conceiving it, not as a practical man, but as a metaphysician would conceive it? When a labouring class, under the pressure of an active propaganda, is persuaded to accept the principle of class war, they only too frequently tend to commit acts which are permitted in any war—acts of plunder, acts of destruction, legitimate enough when practised against the enemy. Violence they understand, but it is a material violence, and finds expression in deeds of damage, particularly during strikes, which Sorel and his disciples would be the first to deplore.

Thus, as a result of the mistaken notion that philosophic conceptions can become the common property of the masses, have theory and practice been divorced. What is there in common between a *sabotage* which deteriorates and limits the product of labour, and contrives in every way to hinder the process of production, and the characteristically Syndicalist doctrine that Labour, being the heir presumptive of Capital, should do nothing likely to compromise the achievements of its parent?[1] How can one reconcile the performance of work that is consciously slovenly and inefficient, and which, though it be begun with a purpose, can only tend to develop into an habitual method, with the declaration of Sorel that the technical perfection of the workman is that which he must most value, and that every influence which tends to depreciate this quality must be banned from the practice of Syndicalism?[2] How can one justify the essentially underhand methods of *sabotage*, the irresponsible spirit of destruction which endangers not only the property, but the lives of many whose feelings towards Labour are most friendly, in the face of assertions that the practice of class war and violence engenders among the labouring classes sentiments "the most noble, the most profound, the most stimulating."[3] Yet *sabotage* is only the logical

[1] Berth, *Les nouveaux aspects du Socialisme*, p. 21.
[2] Quoted in Pouget, *Le Sabotage*, p. 29.
[3] Sorel, *Réflexions sur la violence*, p. 169.

development of a doctrine of class war and a theory of violence taken in a literal significance. It is an evil to which every revolutionary party is exposed.

From such a practice the labouring classes can only reap disaster. It has created among average citizens an opposition to the Syndicalist movement which tends to discredit every Syndicalist activity, even those of reform, and which, if the practice became an integral part of Labour policy, would seriously imperil the good will which the workers have won for themselves in public opinion. Certainly, more than any other method, it has done injury to the cause of revolution.[1] If this be the expression of class war, intelligent members of the working class, fearful lest even their supporters should turn away in disgust, will make haste to adopt a programme of reform. It is scarcely necessary to add that if the capitalists, in accordance with the expressed desire of the school of Sorel, should lend their support to a constant and vigorous class war, it would be not with the purpose of performing their part in the fulfilment of Marxian evolution, but in the hope that the labourers, by such excesses as *sabotage* and by the careless use of strikes, should discredit themselves in the eyes of the general public.

Thus, while it may be taken for granted that the other classes of society will range themselves almost *en masse* on the side of social peace, there will be, even among the wage-earners, a constant majority, which, whether from temperament or under the kindly influence of labour legislation, or as the result of the experience of revolutionary methods, will, except in passing periods of hard times, choose not hostility, but solidarity, not class war, but industrial peace. Whatever may be the allurements of Revolutionary Syndicalism, the fact remains that even in France, the country of its birth, a country prone to revolutionary ideas, it can command only a minority of the class it professes to champion. Successful under such circumstances a method of class war can never be. The activity

[1] Cf. D'Eichthal in *L'Économiste Française*, December 31, 1910.

of a revolutionary minority will not drag the masses into revolution, and if general movements of hostility, embracing large sections of the labouring class, flare up at intervals, the reaction which follows is almost invariably accompanied by a collaboration between Capital and Labour, and a use of conciliation or legislation to remove the disabilities whereby the previous discontent had been engendered, which, by deadening the feelings of hostility, must do much to counteract the preaching of class war. If the Syndicalist assertion be true that class war must be a daily practice constantly increasing in intensity as the social revolution approaches, then these spasmodic eruptions of war, followed, as every industrial country has shown, by more or less protracted periods of social peace, offer little hope for the ultimate victory of Labour. Under such circumstances the inauguration of a new industrial era seems indefinitely postponed.

Moreover in the face of the facts which an analysis of the forces of Revolutionary Syndicalism exposes, what becomes of the revolutionary general strike? How is it possible that Capitalism can be overthrown by a general strike, if not even a majority of wage-earners seem disposed to take part in it? The revolutionary general strike would enjoy even less chance of success than the general strike as practised to-day. In the titanic struggle of classes which would certainly ensue, the labouring class would be the first to surrender, for, unless it could immediately grasp the industry of the nation, it would be the first to experience all the privations which such a stagnation of production would occasion: And if, as seems inevitable, the labouring class would, even then, be divided and not unanimous, to grasp the industry of the nation would be a thing impossible.

It is this latter truth which Syndicalists fail to recognise. Knowing as well as their critics that workers could reap only disaster from the complete stagnation of industry, they have declared that there will be no stagnation, have postulated the absolute necessity that production be

continued by the workers themselves. They will not starve, for they will proceed to appropriate and manipulate for their own benefit, and for that of society at large, the industries to-day in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Far from being accomplished by a strike *des bras croisés*, the social revolution can be achieved only by an active producing proletariat, who, not content with refusing to work for their exploiters, will proceed to take the place of the latter as the controllers and directors of production. But to point out that industry will be taken over by the proletariat simply amounts to an assertion that the strike will be a success, which is begging the question. For it is a monstrous assumption, in the face of the experience of actual general strikes and of the strength of Revolutionary Syndicalism to-day, to take success for granted.

If the wage-earners have succeeded in organising themselves so that they move almost as a single unit, so that operations may not only be planned but carried out with that dispatch and precision which is necessary for success, then a great *levée-en-masse* might be attempted with the best prospects of victory. What is more, if the workers were able thus completely to denude industry of its producers, it would signify a degree of power and organisation which would permit them forthwith to exclude the capitalists from the direction of production, and make the general strike itself unnecessary. Then, indeed, would a general cessation of work, if such were put in practice, be but a formal declaration of revolt from the old order, to be followed immediately by the renewal of production under the control of the once wage-earners. Regarded in this light, the general strike would be rendered superfluous as soon as it became possible. But is not such a conception of the general strike the purest idealism? Is there any possible chance that an organisation so perfect as to ensure success, so complete as to render the very strike unnecessary, could ever be evolved by the labourers? Such an organisation would be difficult, whatever the bond of union; based on an acceptance of ideas of revolu-

tion, it becomes utterly impossible. In France itself, the country of its birth, the history of Revolutionary Syndicalism gives no ground for the hope that even a majority of wage-earners could be drawn into an insurrectionary general strike. And certainly no other industrial country offers any more fruitful field of action. Coming down to hard reality, there is every probability that the revolutionary general strike, if it be undertaken at all, must be undertaken with an incomplete organisation, with the support of a fraction only of the wage-earning class, and that there will be very considerable numbers of labourers who will neither sympathise with it nor take part in it, who might even be drawn into the forces of the opposing side.

But if the workers are thus divided amongst themselves, if there are those who would be willing to stay at work while others strike, the process of stepping into the control of industry, from which the capitalists have been driven, becomes an exceedingly difficult matter. In fact it could be accomplished only by war to the knife. Is one to suppose that those who profit by the existing system are to be excluded from power without offering any resistance? If capitalists stand fast over a mere question of minimum wage, what efforts would they not make, what expedients would they not adopt, when the very industrial order, on which are based all the privileges they enjoy, is threatened with destruction? If they refused to give up their control, only civil war could wrest it from their hands. And in a civil war what chance would the strikers have, limited as they would be to but a proportion of their own class? Against them, as the aggressors in the conflict, would be rushed all the forces of the State—the police, the troops—disciplined, armed, mere fighting machines, in themselves decisive in times of revolution. For the State in such a struggle would be fighting for its own existence. Behind this powerful force would be arrayed all the resources of the bourgeoisie; the vast wealth they have produced would be lavished in organising opposition

to the revolutionary proletariat. The manhood of those classes which find an interest in supporting the existing order—a manhood, sturdy, capable, strengthened by military training and a devotion to sport, would add an element to the foes of Labour as formidable as the army itself.[1] Even among the labouring classes would be found many disposed either to remain neutral or to take an active part against the strikers; on the one hand the lovers of peace, the advocates of reform (a goodly number, if experience be a guide), who would refuse to commit themselves to a policy of revolution, on the other that great mass of wage-earners recruited from the unorganised or from the "yellow" syndicats, formed to co-operate with Capital, who would be influenced very largely by the financial persuasion which the bourgeoisie could exert, and who would be found ranged against the forces of violence. Against such opposition the strikers would be impotent. Scattered, isolated in various parts of the country, possessing and being able to procure no means whereby their forces might effectually be concentrated, they would be helpless before the powers of Capitalism and the State, controlling, if not the railways, at least the transport facilities which motor power affords, and able to concentrate all their strength where the most crushing blows could be dealt.

Of a struggle so one-sided there could be but one issue. Instead of being able to grasp the processes of production, the proletariat would be compelled either to sit silent while stagnation settled upon the industry of the nation, or to rush recklessly into a fight hopeless from the beginning. Upon themselves would recoil the arrest of industrial machinery. Necessities would be scarce, prices would begin to soar, and while the possessing classes would be able to satisfy their needs, the wage-earners, no longer earning wages, thrown back on a scanty hoard soon exhausted, would be brought face to face with the extremes of misery. Instead of the capitalist being reduced to

[1] Jaurés, in *Enquête sur la Grève Générale* (ed. Lagardelle).

starvation, his State falling in ruins about him, it would be the labourer himself who, with his dependants, would feel the pangs of hunger and be overtaken by the flood of material distress. Easy indeed would be the victory, but it would be Capital, not Labour, which would be triumphant. And how miserable the situation of a labouring class defeated in uch a struggle! Crushed under the vigorous reprisals of a bourgeoisie frightened into the harshest measures, their organisations wiped out, their resources exhausted, the labourers would be sunk more deeply than ever in the capitalistic system, doomed to traverse once again the long and arduous climb they had taken so many years to accomplish. The ultimate end of a Syndicalism based on the revolutionary general strike as a means for the emancipation of Labour could only be disaster, and the Syndicalist ideal, the association of free and equal producers, if it is to be attained by such methods, will remain a mere vision in the clouds.

CHAPTER VIII

IS A SYNDICALIST STATE POSSIBLE?

A DISCUSSION of Syndicalism would not be complete without some critical consideration of the organisation of industrial society which would characterise any Syndicalist state. Doubtless, in view of our conclusion that the methods of Syndicalism in action can only end in failure, the question of the future Syndicalist state becomes to a large extent a purely academic one. Yet, as these more or less Utopian proposals are really an integral part of Syndicalist philosophy, and as they have considerable interest in themselves, apart from any relation to a revolutionary method of action, it will not be unprofitable to consider them critically in detail.

Now while there has been a good deal of vague speculation on the economics of to-morrow, which has but little practical interest beyond the insight which it affords into the state of mind of the average Syndicalist, there do emerge certain fundamental notions which can be considered essential parts of Syndicalist thought, and which represent, with certainty, characteristics of any society built up on a Syndicalist basis. To state the question in concrete terms, Revolutionary Syndicalism sets forth these two basic propositions: (1) that the syndicats or trade unions, when they have reached a certain stage of development, must take over and carry on, without any alien interference, all the processes of production; (2) that the organisation of production must follow the federalistic lines exhibited in the French labour unions

of to-day, suppressing the centralisation which crushes all initiative, and giving full play to that principle of autonomy whereby is ensured a system which is at once free, harmonious and efficient. These are the underlying principles of Syndicalism as an economic philosophy of the future. Upon them all discussion must take place. Will the trade unions actually be capable of carrying on the processes of production? Will harmony be assured and chaos averted by a system of economic federalism?

In the first place, can a trade unionism guarantee efficient production? Can it furnish to the members of a society, which it dominates, the goods necessary to a well-ordered and comfortable existence, and this at a reasonable cost? If its production cannot sustain the pace which capitalistic production sustains today, the outlook is hardly promising Indeed, if Syndicalist production does not far exceed in efficiency the production of capitalistic society, it will falsify the declarations of all its adherents and make impossible that automatic solution of the distributive problem at which they have frequently hinted. One must be assured, in short, that a trade union can run an industry, and not only the small shop of a handful of workers, such as are extremely numerous in France to-day, but the large centralised industries, the railways, the mines, the industrial trusts, that are peculiar to modern society. Now, bodies of workers, whether organised as syndicats or not, have frequently, since the industrial revolution, undertaken to carry on without the interference of an employer some form of industry, organising themselves for this purpose into producers' co-operative associations. As independent societies, controlling in their own interests the whole of their product, completely free from the domination of "non-producers," they have, more or less unconsciously, and in a limited fashion, put into practice what might be called constructive Syndicalism. For upon just such associations, elaborated and extended throughout the industry of a whole nation, Syndicalism builds all its constructive proposals. It is,

then, both interesting and instructive, though of course not conclusive, to note the result of Syndicalist experience.

What has been the outcome of producers' co-operation? As is well known, while consumers' co-operation has met with a considerable degree of success, producers' co-operation seems to have succeeded only in exceptional cases. While here and there individual associations have carried on industry with moderate, sometimes with almost brilliant success, the disasters have been so frequent as to occasion wonder whether an industrial society could ever be founded upon the extension of such a system. The reasons for this failure have frequently been set forth, and are attested by students of every shade of economic opinion, Socialists and Syndicalists included.[1] Undoubtedly the principal causes are to be found in (1) the lack of capital and equipment and (2) bad business management. It is difficult for wage-earners to subscribe sufficient capital for an enterprise of their own, even more so, on the scanty security they might be able to offer, to procure capital from others. And so it frequently happens that production is begun with equipment which is inefficient; whereby the workmen are hampered from the first and rendered quite incapable of tiding themselves over periods of considerable depression. In addition to this difficulty, it is only too often the case that the co-operators have come together in a time of considerable unemployment, when business as a whole is slack, and when the starting of a new industry coincides with a sluggishness of demand, which almost invariably prevents even the most insignificant success. An even more vital cause of the failure of producers' co-operation lies in the incapacity, in certain matters, of the labourers themselves. Of the order and administration which are necessary for the success of an enterprise the working classes seem to have little conception. Qualities of managership they constantly under-

[1] Cf. *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, September 15, 1899, p. 355; also Potter, *The Co-operative Movement*, and Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism*, pp. 115–120.

estimate. Refusing in many cases to pay a wage sufficient to attract competent managers or to draw out latent directive abilities from among their own ranks, they have subjected their operations to a shiftless, incompetent direction which makes failure almost certain. If they do get a good manager, the more competent he is, the less do they seem willing to submit to his authority. Jealous of any inequality, chafing under the yoke of discipline, they have made the position of the foreman precarious and undesirable, not unfrequently censuring, after hours, when he ceases to exercise any authority, the acts he has committed in the workshop in his official capacity as director. Under such circumstances the man who does not hasten to resign can only sink into inefficiency. No enterprise can be carried to success under a manager subject to the will—the arbitrary, capricious will—of those whom he is supposed to manage.[1]

The question now arises, will Syndicalism proper improve on these Syndicalist experiments? Has one a right to deduce the failure of Syndicalism from the failure of producers' co-operation? Evidently, between such enterprises and the proposed productive operations of Syndicalism there are certain notable differences. For one thing, constructive Syndicalism is not likely to fail for lack of capital, or of sufficient technical equipment. If the hopes of its exponents are realised, the workmen of the future, far from being compelled to rely, like the co-operators to-day, upon their own scanty resources, will, by the process of expropriation, be able to begin industry with all the productive equipment of the bourgeoisie at their disposal. Nor is it unreasonable to observe, that in view of the unfair conditions which, to-day, make the starting of any workmen's industry a matter of such difficulty, in view also of the enormous advantage to be enjoyed by Syndicalists in the matter of equipment, it is almost impossible to derive any conclusions as to Syndicalism from the experience of producers' co-operation. At

[1] Bernstein, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

the same time, equipment is not everything, it is not even the essential thing. The most magnificent equipment must prove only a source of embarrassment to workmen incapable of making use of it to advantage. Workmen are equally inefficient with capital and tools beyond their powers as with capital and tools incapable of satisfying their productive abilities. As co-operators themselves have confessed, in connection with this very question, "there is a greater need of more intelligence and more capacity than of more money."[1] In organising and directive power, in the brains necessary to carry on a business, not in the merely material aids to production, lies the only hope of workmen's co-operation; and if such abilities are lacking to-morrow as they seem to be lacking to-day, Syndicalism is doomed to failure. This even Syndicalists recognise. "What," exclaims Sorel, referring not to the lack of capital, but to the lack of ability, "what would happen, if after the social revolution, industry was to be directed by groups incapable to-day of carrying on a co-operative workshop?"[2] That this incapacity would be permanent, Sorel, of course, did not believe, and it was an integral part of his programme that the labouring classes must be just so educated that they could carry on, not only a co-operative workshop, but every kind of industry existing in modern society. Moreover, unlike a good many Socialists, whose hostility to co-operation is well known, he believed that much of that education could be obtained in the actual practice of producers' co-operation itself; wherein, if the wage-earner has failed, it is because he has not made sufficient effort, and wherein assiduous endeavour would, in the end, produce the directive abilities indispensable to the fair working of future society. For the knowledge of how to carry on an industry comes, like a great many other acquirements, only by practice. In short, it is directive capacity which counts, and if Syndicalism succeeds, it will be

[1] Quoted by Bernstein, *op. cit.*, p. 126.
[2] *L'Avenir Socialiste des Syndicats*, p. 38.

because it is able, not only to call forth that capacity, but to give it the scope which it requires.

But both in calling forth capacity and in giving it scope, there is every reason to believe that Syndicalism is singularly deficient. There is nothing about trade union organisations which is peculiarly fitted to educate the labourers in handling modern industries. Trade unions may inculcate the principles of solidarity, they may be useful in gaining material reforms from the bourgeoisie, they may succeed in promoting workmen's insurance or technical education; but with all this they do not supply the quality which can make their members capable of carrying on independently the industries in which they are engaged. The direction of an industry involves an administrative mechanism and powers of controlling it, of which the labourers are ignorant, and with which they could only become familiar by actual experience. And that experience the syndicats cannot give them, and will not be able to give them, until industry is taken over through the social revolution. If there lies an opportunity in producers' co-operation, such as Sorel has pointed out, it remains closed to the vast majority, just because material success is so problematical. Wage-earners are not in a position, even with the funds of their organisations at their disposal, to devote themselves to industries from which they derive no profit, solely with the view of obtaining the practice in direction, which they might possibly need later on. As it is, it would almost seem that the directive capacity of the wage-earners, save in the cases of the comparatively small number who rise from the ranks, must remain dormant till the day when the expropriation of the bourgeoisie will take place. If such be the case, it will go ill with a society accustomed to efficient productive management, compelled, suddenly, to submit to the awkward and destructive attempts of a labouring class, assuming for the first time, in many cases, the direction of industry. Before the somewhat tardy education could be completed, the productive mechanism

of the country would be so disjointed as to endanger the very existence of the new social order.

Even if this difficulty were overcome, even if, in the stress of necessity, directive capacity were engendered where it had not existed before, there is the still graver danger lest in a Syndicalist state there should not be given to directive abilities that scope which, alone, would make them effective. The supreme defect of the labouring classes is their tendency to distrust directive ability. When productive co-operation fails, it is much more frequently because the manager has been mistrusted than that no manager of ability has been forthcoming. This defect, if anything, Syndicalism accentuates. In theory, Syndicalists love to dwell on the superior virtues of the minority as compared with the sheep-like stupidity of the majority. They have declared that in the syndicats there are comrades who, by their very competence, unconsciously assume command over the others, and whose authority, though moral only, is nevertheless very real. Professing to believe in "the government of the mass by the capable, the best, the élite of the working-men," they do not doubt that the abilities which are inherent in the working class, and which education would foster, would receive all due respect and all necessary scope from the bulk of wage-earners. These are the rights of superior intelligence which will, if necessary, be imposed upon the labouring class.[1] This theory, unfortunately, is actually vitiated by another doctrine most vigorously preached wherever Syndicalism finds a hearing. The notion which has been most incessantly drummed into the minds of the wage-earners, which completely permeates their organisations, is, not that the masses should subordinate themselves to the capable few, but that all authority is to disappear,[2] that in the syndicat every man is free and equal, as in the Federations each syndicat, and in the C.G.T. each Federation. Growing up in an

[1] Berth in *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, January 1, 1903, p. 14.
[2] Cf. *La Voix du Peuple*, Nos. 109 and 110, December, 1902.

atmosphere in which complete autonomy is a byword, the wage-earning classes inherit a spirit of insubordination which concerts ill with the attempts to enforce minority rule. For the principle of minority rule is a comparatively obscure doctrine of a few "intellectuals," while the notion of the free and equal producer is the stock-in-trade of innumerable propagandists and practical Syndicalists. If the labourer does not distrust ability, he has learned to distrust authority; and when authority and ability are combined, as they must be in any efficient system of production, ability must suffer the consequences of the hatred of authority.

What is the popular notion as to this matter may be realised from suggestions such as have occasionally appeared in *La Voix du Peuple*,[1] that directive functions should be but for short periods, and renewable only in case of satisfactory tenure. But if Syndicalism succeeds in freeing the wage-earners from the bugbear of external authority only by destroying all authority, it will have achieved a state of things eminently consistent with equality, but utterly destructive of efficiency in production. If the doctrine of autonomy and freedom become translated in the mind of the average wage-earner into views of directive functions such as those exhibited in *La Voix du Peuple*, Syndicalism will be able to boast of little success in its policy of reconstruction. Technical education may give a mechanical efficiency, freedom from restraint may give a vigour of productiveness, that will surpass anything the present system can show, but an insubordination which must discourage the appearance of directive abilities would have a destructive effect which no advantages could counterbalance. Nor if the mass of wage-earners determine to put in practice the libertarian principles preached by their leaders, if they insist on equality in the workshop, and some kind of control over their managers to express that equality, would there be, according to Syndicalist theory itself, any power capable

[1] For example, No. 98, October, 1902.

of compelling them to be otherwise. They would be as free to accept or reject propositions made by their own or fellow organisations, as they are free now to accept or reject the recommendations of the C.G.T. It is one of the ironies of the history of Socialism that Syndicalism, by the propagation of one of its fundamental principles, should seriously endanger its own ultimate success. In the contempt of directive functions which their anarchistic doctrines engenders, Syndicalists tend to perpetuate the errors which have been so largely responsible for the failure of producers' co-operation.

The dangers arising from such a state of things seem particularly grave, when one comes to consider the large industries so typical of modern industrialism. It may happen that, just as the only successes of producers' co-operation have been, with few exceptions, in small industries, so Syndicalism may escape failure when practised in small shops with a few dozen workmen, where the differentiation of function is not minute, where the absence of complicated details and the security of the market makes the question of management of comparatively slight importance. In a country like France, where such industries have remained a very common feature to this day, there is afforded not only an unique opportunity for the spread of Syndicalism, but also a reasonable hope for its partial success in practice. But this fails to touch large-scale production. Industry may not be concentrating so rapidly as Marx predicted, but one must admit that combinations, trusts, large-scale industries in general, constitute the most characteristic feature of modern industrialism, and this in France as in other countries. It is in the management of railways, mines, steel works, textile industries, etc., that Syndicalism is put to the real test, the test from which it must emerge triumphant, if the future is to be within its power.

Now it is obvious that the difficulty of maintaining equality in a workshop or factory is enhanced according as the business grows larger, and that at a certain stage

equality becomes absolutely incompatible with the growing necessity for efficient and more or less autocratic management. At that stage, in fact, either equality breaks down or the industry ceases to grow, or, what is more likely, begins to decay, To which of these alternatives industry in a Syndicalist State would tend, is patent. So long as industry remained characteristically Syndicalist, with no central authority to enforce obedience, but relying entirely either on the harmonious self-interest or the altruistic solidarity of the working class, there can be no question that such industries as were nascent would cease to grow, and that with the large-sized industries of modern society the labourers would be utterly unable to cope. For the industrial growth, to the furtherance of which Capital is so enthusiastically exhorted by Syndicalist philosophers, is resulting in a development of industry, which will place it quite beyond the powers of any working class trained in the peculiar principles of Syndicalism. The complicated processes involved in the handling of a steel industry, a mine, or any large industrial concern—the purchase of raw material, the marketing of the product, the problems of capitalisation and accounting, the rewards to be apportioned to the thousand operations resulting from differentiation of process—call for a degree of authority on the one hand and of subordination on the other, which only some form of centralisation can secure. But with centralisation Syndicalism has nothing in common, and either Syndicalism will break down or progress will cease.

Once again it is instructive to turn to the experience of producers' co-operation, brought face to face with the problems of development. In the case of such enterprises as meet with success, particularly if they become of more than moderate size, it is of frequent occurrence that equality breaks down, and the direction is assumed by an authoritative body consisting very largely of the workers who originally began the business. As trade expands, and it becomes expedient to take into the firm

more workers, the charter members only too readily form a close association, constituting themselves a body of employers and paying the newcomers wages only. A well-known example in France is that of the association of spectacle-makers (*lunetiers*), which in 1900 consisted of 65 associates, 60 adherents, and 1,300 wage-earning employés.[1] Thus is the struggle of equality *versus* efficiency settled in favour of efficiency by a return to a modified form of capitalism, and a reintroduction of the very wage-system which such associations were formed to abolish. To this same tendency, Syndicalism would undoubtedly be exposed. Face to face with the necessity of carrying on industries in every stage of development and complication, the labourers would be compelled to work out some form of centralised direction. In every considerable factory authority would be assumed by the few. In every growing industry the original workers would tend to form a society excluding the newcomers. Not only capital but capitalism would reappear. The very lack of central authority would serve to facilitate the growth of an employing class, whose interests would be in opposition to those of their former fellow-labourers. In the autonomy afforded to every factory and every local body of wage-earners would be engendered the atmosphere favourable to the growth of petty economic despotisms. If the minority of the working-men, "the capable, the best, the élite," should assume the direction of industry, it would be by becoming employers, not by remaining workmen anxious to do well by their fellows. In the welter of modern industrialism, the republic of free and equal producers would be little more than the fiction which it is to-day. Equality could not long exist, and from its ruins would rise a modified form of capitalistic industry.

To such an unsocialistic outcome, considering the present and future development of industry, is doomed any form of Socialism which neglects the coercive and authoritative function; and it is just because it does not

[1] Weill, *Histoire du Mouvement Social en France*, p. 443, note 1.

err in this respect that State Socialism offers a more reasonable guarantee of success. That authority and coercion could be carried by State Socialism to a degree not far removed from tyranny, and that such a development would be not only obnoxious in the extreme, but subversive of individual initiative and responsibility, it would be idle to deny. But State Socialism, despite the abuse which Syndicalists heap upon it, has this advantage over its rival, that it is compatible with some kind of central direction of industry, and permits the exaltation of the powers of direction, not to the exaggerated heights which they have reached to-day, but to an independent position safely above the paralysing interference of a mass of labourers, jealous of authority and discipline, and anxious to assert in practice the impossible dogma that all men are free and equal. Only by such means will Socialism be prevented from falling back into Capitalism. Only a Socialism which depends on some more reliable bond of union than the sentiment of solidarity among labourers, can evoke a regular, harmonious and efficient production, and ensure the disappearance of the wage-system, as it is now understood, beyond all recall.

The question of competition offers a similar difficulty. It is the hope of Syndicalists not only to produce efficiently, but to replace competition and avoid its attendant evils by the harmonious co-operation of bodies of workers, the prime aim of whose labour would be, not to acquire profits, but to satisfy in the most economic fashion the material needs of society. Instead of the unorganised squabble of competition there will be a careful and scientific division of product, to each syndicat or to each federation being assigned that proportion of production which is its share. Now it is a serious question whether the federalism by which this harmony is to be achieved does not run the greatest risk of degenerating into chaos. If the optimism of Syndicalists leads them to see in the spirit of solidarity and altruism every guarantee for the smooth and harmonious working of their industrial

system, the most ordinary recognition of human weaknesses discovers that such guarantees are of all the most unstable, and apt completely to break down before the force of aroused self-interest. In the C.G.T. itself, it has been only too frequently proved that the comparatively complete unanimity, which would seem necessary to procure the proper co-ordination of various producing units, is an absolute fiction. Far from displaying an edifying spirit of solidarity, the workers of France, in the professedly Syndicalist congresses and organisations in general, have revealed dissensions as bitter as those to which the French Socialist parties have been subjected. Nor is there any reason to believe that a different state of affairs would exist in the Syndicalist State. The community of interest would be as lacking then as now. If the labouring-class to-day displays some solidarity, it is because it unites all its members against a common oppressor. But when the common oppressor has disappeared, when the capitalistic system no longer exists, and the labouring classes become a society of free and equal producers, one of the strongest motives towards union is withdrawn. When once the labourers have been released from the bonds which defence against Capital necessitates, they will tend, under the sway of self-interest, to form communities which, among themselves, will reproduce the rivalry of the capitalistic system.

It is, in short, a question whether competition would not rather be perpetuated than abolished. It is the experience of producers' co-operation that the rivalry between different associations of labourers in the same trade is frequently more intense, more bitter than that which dominates Capitalism. When the product of industry falls back into the hands of those who produce, when the return to labour depends not upon the will of an employer, but upon the volume of sales, it is almost inevitable that associations of labourers, far from being willing to limit their own production and thus their share in material wealth, should rather try to extend their

business at the expense of other associations. Nor of this are Syndicalists ignorant. It is precisely because of its tendency to resurrect all the evils of competition, and invariably to cause discord and conflicts among labour organisations, that producers' co-operation, despite the exhortations of "intellectuals" like Georges Sorel, has never received the support, and has often earned the condemnation, of Syndicalists in general.[1] For competition is by no means a monopoly of capitalistic industry. It exists among wage-earners as well as among the bourgeoisie, and if it is perpetuated in producers' co-operation, it has an equal chance of life in the Syndicalist State.

In any case, however anxious the workers may be, as a result of their experience of its evils, to get rid of competition, the federalism which pervades their organisations is not equal to the task. If there is any lesson to be drawn from the experience of capitalistic industry, it is that competition can only be permanently averted by a union based on something more solid than the bonds of voluntary agreement. Nothing is more characteristic of modern industrial development than the movement whereby competition has given place to agreement, and rival businesses have to a greater or less degree sunk their individuality in some form of combination. Moreover in this essentially self-defensive process, one can notice a progression from merely voluntary agreements, such as pools, to associations in which the bond is material enough to afford some sort of control over constituent members, such associations as kartells, which are held together by a legally incorporated agency, or trusts, in which, as far as outside relations are concerned, the individual companies form a single corporative unit. For it seems that despite the advantages in escaping industrial rivalry, agreements depending on the voluntary consent of the parties concerned have so constantly been wrecked upon the rocks of self-interest, that producers, rather than fall

[1] Cf. *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, 1900, p. 346 *et seq.*

back into the anarchy of competition, have been compelled to subject themselves to central control, with authority and coercion in its power. It has been seen that so soon as a producer finds more profit in breaking than in keeping the rules which have been laid down. voluntary combinations fall to pieces. Such action may be short-sighted, but it is so constantly exhibited as to make it doubtful whether the mere desire to escape competition is sufficient to bring about its disappearance.

It is surely probable that what is true of producers to-day will be true of producers to-morrow. The voluntary association to which Syndicalism has committed itself, the federalism in economic matters which asserts the privilege of each body of workers to act as seems to it advisable, will make it wellnigh impossible to prevent the competitive instinct from finding expression. If syndicats in the same industry discover that it is more to their taste to vie with each other in producing and selling their commodities, than to take their part in the harmony which their Federation is supposed to assure, there is absolutely no arrangement which can prevent them from doing so. That they are perfectly free to accept or reject the recommendations of any larger organisation to which they may belong, is the very essence of Syndicalist ideas on association. Under such circumstances it is extremely probable, if the experience, not only of capitalistic industry but of workmen's co-operation, be taken as a guide, that self-interest will prevail, and that competition will spasmodically arise to replace the harmony of federation. If the proletariat is to inherit the organised industry of the capitalist, it will be called upon to operate many industries where, especially between the larger establishments, competition is both brisk and bitter, and where among the labourers, no longer bound together in opposition to a common enemy, there would be a tendency to revert to those particularist sentiments which makes most men ardent defenders of their own place of work. It will have to face also the problem of controlling

the amalgamations, whereby rival concerns have contrived to avoid the evils of competition, and whose success depends peculiarly upon a management that is authoritative and centralised, and in every part opposed to the principles of Syndicalism. And in these situations, it is incumbent upon the proletariat to effect or maintain the disappearance of competition, and the establishment of a federalistic régime. The task is impossible. The inherited competition of the former class of industry would with difficulty be subdued by a system depending on the solidarity of the labourers, and the introduction of federalism as the organising principle of amalgamations would result only in weakening the bonds which hold them together, and in hurling them back into the competitive anarchy from which they had arisen. However keenly the labourers may recognise the evils of competition, there will arise so many opportunities for the satisfaction of local or particular interests, that only the voluntary submission of producers to a control which will forcibly keep them from yielding to otherwise irresistible temptations, can prevent Syndicalism from being swallowed up in a return of the individualism of to-day. Society might solve its difficulties by evolving some form of adequate control, it might prevent the recurrence of competition by suppressing the freedom and autonomy of local units, but in so doing it would have destroyed all that is characteristic of Syndicalism.

It is not only in the matter of competition that the federalistic arrangements of Syndicalism would be liable to break down. It is an assumption too little founded on probability that the system of exchange will be any more satisfactory. What will be the basis for the determination of price? To take a single instance, how will a Syndicalist society settle that essential but most difficult question, the fixing of railway rates? In a momentary lapse into Utopianism, M. Pouget, of *La Voix du Peuple*, has advanced the suggestion that, under the control of the National Syndicat of Railway Workers, the railways

will perform the service of transporting both passengers and merchandise free of charge, whereby, through the abolition of the various administrative offices necessitated for the fixing and enforcement of tariffs, a great saving will be effected.[1] Whether the workers in question would be willing to give their services under such conditions is another matter. Not so easily is the transport problem solved. There must be prices for transportation as for any other service, prices which will be fixed by those who do the transporting; and it is at least equally probable that the prices so determined will be unsatisfactory to the users of railways as that they will be satisfactory. Particularly in an industry which tends to become a monopoly and is at the same time indispensable to the public, prices are liable to become too elevated for general acceptance. To-day there is a remedy at hand for consumers feeling themselves unduly exploited. More than one modern industrial nation has been compelled to recognise its duty to supervise the rates imposed by railways, and other forms of monopolised public utilities, and to limit the arbitrary power which such producers may assume of fixing prices where they will bring in the highest net profits. But Syndicalism is barred from the application of this remedy. If the Federations controlling transport chose to set up a scale of prices unsatisfactory to others, there is absolutely no machinery competent to restrain their self-interest, and hold them to a policy more in harmony with the needs of the general public. A refusal to follow the recommendations, say of the Committees of the C.G.T., would be quite in accordance with the most cherished principles of Syndicalist writers. If they object that the relations among the workers would be so harmonious that such examples of revolt would never arise, one can only reply that the assumption is too bold, and that the dissensions among the labouring classes to which every industrial nation can testify, would lead one to believe that the solidarity

[1] *La Voix du Peuple*, No. 84, June, 1902.

of labour is unequal to the task Syndicalists would impose upon it. For if solidarity is insufficient to-day, what would it be in the Syndicalist state, when the labourers are deprived of their most powerful bond of union—the common hatred of Capitalism?

That any future society, whatever the model on which it was built, could long allow the interests of the mass of consumers to be set at naught by the selfish action of particular bodies of workers seems hardly probable. But it is absolutely certain that the only steps which society could take to prevent this evil, would, like any action to prevent the recurrence of competition, be at the expense of the fundamental principles of Syndicalism. It is no paradox to declare that harmony can be achieved only through some measure of compulsion. But if a Syndicalist society allows, say, the Federal Committees of the C.G.T., or in local matters a *Bourse du travail*, to supplement their recommendations by compulsory measures to have them put into execution, it is well on the road towards a centralisation foreign to Syndicalism. To save society from chaos, the central body, intended originally only for purposes of administration, would rapidly usurp functions of authority and coercion, and though a certain leaven of federalism might be retained, and the powers of the central body be delegated much more than at present to local units, the anarchism of groups, which is so characteristic of a Syndicalism of which Proudhon is the forerunner, would inevitably disappear. In its place would be erected a central organisation, which, with its external will, would reproduce many of the features of the present-day State, and would in fact be, what in many ways is the very opposite of Syndicalism—State Socialism. If trade unions or any other purely labour organisations, excluding all non-producers, succeeded in accomplishing the work of production, it might be on a basis which would retain the semblance of Syndicalism, but it would be a Syndicalism which its exponents to-day would be the first to disown.

CONCLUSION.

THE limitations of the theory and the defect of the practice of Revolutionary Syndicalism present themselves so strongly to careful observers that even Revolutionary Syndicalists themselves have become conscious of error. The experience of class war in action seems to give even the most enthusiastic occasion for serious thought, and under the force of events many have been compelled to revise their articles of faith. The uniform failure of the general strike; the discouragement, disorganisation and disillusion, which, as a result, invariably overwhelm the participants; the excesses in which too many strikers have indulged, inflamed by a propaganda preached too vigorously and accepted too literally; the hostility to Syndicalism, whether Reformist or Revolutionist, which such excesses (and, indeed, the practice of class war in general) must excite among every section of the people;—to all this it has become impossible even for the most prejudiced to remain blind. The rank-and-file of the labourers in France will ever remain suspicious of a doctrine, from the practice of which they reap little but disaster; and even militant leaders, whose militancy has been for years above reproach, have begun to waver in their convictions. It is interesting to note in the career of several the rise and fall of revolutionary ambitions. Enthusiastic partisans of the Labour movement, impatient to see the end of a hateful system, they attached themselves with zeal to the cause of Revolutionary Syndicalism, in the days when Parliamentary Socialism had discredited itself with quarrels, and fallen into apparent impotence. A decade later one sees them

ambitious as ever for the advance of the labouring classes, but disillusioned of the policy of violence, sick with its defeats, and ready to transfer their energies to the more moderate practice of the reformists. Such has been the experience of two of the most capable militants the movement has produced, M. Neil and M. Guérard. M. Neil, former secretary of the Montpellier *Bourse du travail*, afterwards an active revolutionary in the *Fédération des Bourses du travail*, and one of those most responsible for its amalgamation with the C.G.T., a prominent contributor to *Le Mouvement Socialiste* and *La Voix du Peuple*, and in general an active exponent of Revolutionary Syndicalism both in theory and in practice, has become converted to moderate tactics, and in 1909 led the reformist forces in the C.G.T.[1] In M. Guérard, for years secretary of the National Syndicat of Railway Workers, a man convinced by hard experience, in the strike of 1898, of the evils of violence as a means for the emancipation of Labour, the reformists gained an adherent who, throughout a decade and more, was able to rally to their standards a very important body of workers, and who proved one of the ablest opponents of a form of Syndicalism from which, by a natural process, he had turned away.

But the most significant experience is that of M. Georges Sorel. Sorel, the author of *Réflexions sur la Violence*, and other notable Syndicalist works, the leading "intellectual," undoubtedly, of Revolutionary Syndicalism, who both in France and abroad has been regarded as its presiding genius, and whose connection with the movement has been so intimate, whose responsibility for its theories so overwhelming, that some have bestowed upon it the appellations *Sorelism* and *Le Socialisme Sorelien*; even Sorel, the high priest of revolution, has drained the cup of disillusion. And he has given public utterance to his despair. In a letter read before the Italian Syndicalists at the Congress of

[1] Weill, *Histoire du Mouvement Social en France*, p. 379.

Bologna, December, 1910, he proclaimed his renunciation of all Syndicalist activity. Referring to a little work of his in Italian, he went on to say:—

"This work, *Confessioni*, is destined to be the last Syndicalist publication of the author of *Réflexions sur la Violence*. It seems to him that Syndicalism has not realised expectations. Many people hope that the future will correct the evils of the present; but the author is too old to live in distant hopes; and he has resolved to devote his remaining years to the investigation of other questions which create a lively interest among the educated youth of France." [1]

That such defections should have their effect upon the C.G.T., is inevitable, and there have not been lacking indications that the forces of revolution are weakening. The admittance of the miners in 1908, a concession dictated by the indispensability of the miners to any movement of comprehensive general strike, was a distinct addition to the party of reform. If the revolutionists still control the C.G.T., their power is based on a system of representation peculiarly precarious, which seems every year more in danger of breaking down. Despite the difficulties opposed to the overthrow of a system, the abolition of which can be achieved only by a self-denying ordinance, which the small and revolutionary syndicats profiting by the arrangement are by no means willing to make, there is reason to believe that the advocates of proportional representation are gaining ground, and every Congress sees the conflict between the rival camps becoming more even.[2] Should the system which obtains today be overcome, the C.G.T. would probably be devoted

[1] *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, March, 1911, pp. 184; 185.

[2] The following figures from *La Revue Socialiste*, November, 1908, p. 458, illustrate the tendency in the Congresses.

Year.	P.C. for Proportional Representation.	P.C. against Proportional Representation.
1901 ..	.. 5·6 ..	.. 94·4
1902 ..	.. 16·4 ..	.. 83·6
1904 ..	.. 31·3 ..	.. 68·7
1908 ..	.. 34·1 ..	.. 65·9

to methods less dangerous for the wage-earners than those which it now champions. For even at present, under existing arrangements, the moderate tendencies of the workers as a whole are beginning to appear behind the "façade" revolutionism which characterises the public policy of the C.G.T. Less violent, perhaps, than any Congress of the Confederation, the Congress of Toulouse, 1910, gives a clue to the developments in French Syndicalism. A Congress which declares that "Syndicalists ought, *above all*, to occupy themselves in increasing wages and improving the hygienic conditions of factories, in reducing the hours of labour, and all the customary pretensions of employers, in short, in pointing the way for their followers and directing the working-class towards a better social state," [1] is speaking the language, not of revolution, but of reform. This is solidarity, social peace. If this be the policy for the wage-earners, the daily revolution has assumed an aspect which might endear it to all friends of Labour, but it is scarcely to be identified with that practice of class war, as expressed in the general strike, which Syndicalists have constantly advocated.

For the general strike, though it is the form *par excellence* of Revolutionary Syndicalism in action, and the means by which alone the revolution could be achieved, has become discredited, as Syndicalists well know, and it is because of this that it is in danger of losing its place as the principal plank in the platform of the C.G.T. The leaders of Labour are turning to other methods more likely to succeed, or of which the failure would, at least, involve less misery for those who have been induced to move. It is a fact of the utmost significance, that in 1910 three members of the Confederal Committee of the C.G.T. were elected as Socialists to the Chamber of Deputies.[2] Considering that the exponents of Syndicalism have denounced with all the vigour of which they were capable

[1] *La Revue Socialiste*, November, 1910, p. 465.
[2] Weill, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

the method of parliamentary action, have denounced it as useless to Labour and a vain attempt to capture one of the most intimate strongholds of Capitalism; considering that they have persisted in their rule of "no politics in the C.G.T," and have professed to hold aloof from every political school, it is, surely, an important departure that three members of the Confederal Committee should become Socialist deputies. The hostility to politics which Syndicalists have continually paraded before the public, is apparently giving way under the necessity of replacing the general strike—the revolutionary activity of the labourers on their own economic field—by some method easier of carrying to an outcome beneficial to the working classes. But when Syndicalism begins to plunge into the political arena, revolutionism at least is beginning to decline in power. For in parliamentary activity class war is bound to disappear, and class war is the very essence of Revolutionary Syndicalism.

Whether the C.G.T. will in the end be captured by the Reformists, time alone can show; but if the practice of revolutionary methods meets with as little success during the next decade as it has enjoyed in the last, one may venture to prophesy the acceptance of more moderate policies. That revolution as a doctrine will always find partisans in a country like France is not to be denied. The very nature of its people—and the same might be said of Italy—ensures the constant presence of a violent element, which must find some outlet for its energies, if not in Revolutionary Syndicalism, then in some other school equally devoted to the methods of revolution. Nor can any observer fail to notice the occasional revivals of violent activity, which, for one reason or another, sweep over the labouring classes. Times of peculiar distress, such as seem periodic even in this day of disappearing crises, will foster discontent and revolutionary zeal as no propaganda can ever hope to do. Ill-judged or even necessary repression of strikers by the Government will occasion a wave of violence vastly

encouraging to the militants. Thus the veritable battle which took place in 1908 at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges between strikers and the troops, engendered a hatred against a "murderous" Government which found violent expression in the pronounced revolutionism of the Congress of Marseilles, September 1908.[1] But if, as seems to be the case, there is a definite and purposeful movement away from revolutionary methods, particularly as expressed in the general strike, such occasional outbursts of militancy can serve to retard but not to avert it. Just because they have realised that the success of the C.G.T. is impossible against the opposition of the overwhelming majority of the French people, many of the leaders of the workers have committed themselves to a policy of moderation, from which, because the interests of Labour depend upon their firmness, they will not be moved by temporary set-backs.

If they succeed, Syndicalism will still remain, but Revolutionary Syndicalism as a guiding factor in the Labour movement would have abandoned the field. Their leaders will still hold the labourers to those economic methods wherein lies their greatest advantage, they will still regard the syndicats as the superior means for the emancipation of wage-earners, but they will cease to preach the general strike, relying on the more peaceful forms of Syndicalist activity. Strikes there will be, but only in the last resort. In trade agreements, in conciliation, in other forms of social peace, they will find more suitable means for elevating the labouring classes. They will not cease to await the social revolution, but they will hasten its approach, not by the single method of the general strike, expressive of class war, but by every method available to the wage-earner, adapting the means to suit the circumstances. Thus by strikes if need be, by trade agreements, by legislation, they will achieve the gradual acquisition of reforms, whereby ultimately the nation will pass from the old to the new system of

[1] Weill, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

industry. They will develop the labour unions because of their powers in the economic field, but they will not overlook the method of parliamentary activity, so capable, if rightly used, of improving the status of the labourers. Only by thus using *all* the weapons at the disposal of Labour, and using them opportunely and with discretion, can Syndicalism perform a genuine service to its followers. Only thus can it avoid the evils to which a one-sided policy must inevitably expose it. There may or may not be a time for revolutionary methods, but it is a fallacy, fertile in disaster, to employ them on every occasion, indiscriminately, with entire lack of foresight and of care. And it is in the committing of this fallacy that Revolutionary Syndicalism has proved itself a harmful doctrine, and an even more harmful practice, for the labouring classes.

And yet there has been much in the history of Revolutionary Syndicalism which compels our admiration. The men who have inspired the movement, both the philosophical group centred in *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, and the more practical leaders of the workers in the *Bourses du travail*, in the Federations and in the C.G.T., have been animated not by any spirit of gain—for in work of this sort there is no material reward and little enough of honour—but by a lofty enthusiasm, a splendid zeal in the cause of the toiling masses. Whatever be one's opinion of the value of their solution of the Labour problem, it is not to be denied that they have propagated their theories with an extraordinary vigour and with a persistent and lavish expenditure of their powers, which is scarcely equalled in any other social movement of to-day. And they have had their reward. Their policy of violence may have disappointed their expectations, but it is admitted that the strength of the Labour movement in France is due very largely to the " prodigious activity " of the militant Socialists and Syndicalists.

" They have given a remarkable example of what can be done among a free people by an oral and written propaganda "

The orators of the C.G.T. "have buried themselves in the narrow circle of their commune or their canton, allowing neither fatigue, nor attacks, nor, what is more discouraging, the indifferences of the masses, to arrest their efforts. In a country where all parties are reproached with depending too much upon the State, they have shown what can be accomplished by individual initiative." [1]

They have succeeded in arousing the consciousness of the most apathetic workers. Under their influences organisations have been born in the most unexpected quarters—for instance, among the agricultural labourers—and workingmen in general have been stirred to revolt against conditions, under which for too many years they had remained inert, submissive. Such incitement may lead to excesses, but it is not all harmful. If it brings before the wage-earners the vivid hope of better things, if it drives them to obtain for themselves ameliorations, which, otherwise, by a much slower process, would have to be obtained for them, it performs a service of permanent value. And the Revolutionary Syndicalists, in so far as they have engendered among workers habits of independence and self-reliance, deserve unstinted praise.

It is something, too, to have pointed out the comparative impotence of parliamentary activity. The indiscriminating faith of many Socialists in the method of politics was an evil, in France, well-nigh as dangerous as the Syndicalist faith in the general strike. It was leading to a neglect of the economic aspect of the Labour movement, which sacrificed a valuable opportunity for the prosecution of reforms. Revolutionary Syndicalism has changed that. The wage-earners may not be convinced of the uselessness of parliamentary activity, but the propaganda of Syndicalism has undoubtedly succeeded in reducing that method of action to its proper proportions. Its limitations, at least, have been impressed upon all, and it must take its place as one, and only one, of the methods at the disposal of the wage-earners.

[1] Weill, *op. cit.*, p. 500.

Above all, are they to be applauded for their opposition to every influence which would make of the workman a mere machine, and of his labour something painful but unavoidable. It is to their credit that they have laid stress on the essential dignity of labour, that they would raise the labourer from a mere brute force to an active, conscious, intelligent agent in the process of production. In refusing to allow the individuality of the producer to be sunk under the overpowering weight of a centralised authority, they have laid bare the gravest danger lurking in any system of State Socialism. For nothing could be more destructive of the organic strength of the producing class than its reduction to a class of petty functionaries.

The service of Revolutionary Syndicalism to the cause of Labour must be sought, in short, not in its programme of action, nor in its model for future society, but in the spirit of independence and militancy which it has kept alive, and energetically fostered, in the hearts of the labouring classes. Its insistence on the practical application of the great motto of the International—" the emancipation of the labourers must be the work of the labourers themselves "—has engendered a habit of self-reliance, a courage, and an optimism among the workers, that can only be a cause for general gratification. And if its one-sided propaganda has succeeded in forcing itself upon the equally one-sided policy of the Socialists, so that a compromise has been reached whereby every reasonable effort in behalf of Labour can be indulged without fear of anathema, it has brought about a result which will make rejoice the great majority of the friends of the labouring classes.

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